

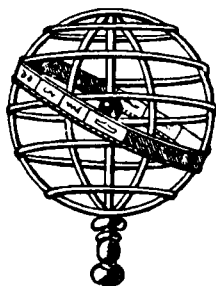
THE PLUNGER

BY
HAWLEY SMART



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BY
HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF
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OR LICENSE," ETC., ETC.

THIRD EDITION.

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THE PLUNGER.



CHAPTER I.

“SAXHAM.”

A CLEANER, more prosperous, little village than Saxham did not exist in the garden of England. There were no tumbledown mud and stud cottages with broken windows and ragged thatched roofs in Saxham, but the inhabitants dwelt in limestone houses, with diamond-glazed lattices, with bright flower-decked little gardens in front of their doors, and with a well-to-do air about their tenements, that it would be good to see in every village in the country.

It has been said of the pretty little town of Doncaster “that the women fry ham all day, and that the men talk about horses and John Scott all night.” In Saxham the talk of the population was chiefly of horses and hops, and one of the chief excitements of the men at all events, was to gamble in a mild manner over these two absorbing topics. Hops we know are the main industry of the county, and that the growing of hops is of a very speculative

nature is also well known; that the profits are great in a good year, and that the losses are large in a bad one is well understood, and that in buying and selling and betting upon what sort of a crop the coming one will be, gambling has gone on from time immemorial.

But how came it about that Saxham should take such an interest in horses, or, to put it more properly, in horse racing? It was easily accounted for—Was not Squire Wrexford, who lived at “The Grange” half a mile outside the village, the owner of one of the crack breeding studs in England. Wondrous were the prices paid for those high bred colts and fillies when the Saxham yearlings were put up for sale at Newmarket during the July week, and from John Crowder, the landlord of the “Marquis of Granby,” who considered himself rather an authority on breeding and turf lore generally, down to the sexton, did not Saxham invariably stand a Saxham bred horse for a big race; all save one, and that was Sulky Dick, the misanthropic ostler of the “Marquis of Granby,” who, though of a sporting turn of mind, took a distrustful view of his fellow creatures both human and equine, and was ever enunciating the doctrine, “that life was full of disappointments, that you were always shut in or going the wrong side of the post or being objected to or something or other in this world, that what you wanted never took place,

and that when you expected a horse to win, the only thing you could be sure about was that it wouldn't."

The sulky one acted up to his principles in his own little way, and invariably laid the odds in crowns against the favourite, which was, after all, only what the magnates of the betting-ring do in hundreds of pounds. Still, "the Raven," as he was often called by the villagers, in proportion to his speculations was probably as successful as anybody in the little hamlet.

The Grange was about half a mile from the village, a quaint old gabled house of red brick of the Elizabethan period; it stood in a well-timbered though not large park, in the corner of which nearest the village might still be seen massive and grey, the ruined keep of Saxham Castle. As for the Wrexforths, how long they had been lords of the village and adjoining lands, neither Dugdale nor the county history ventured to pronounce. The founder of the family had in all probability flourished in those grand old times, when the maxim that:

"He may take, who has the power,
And he may keep who can,"

was in full swing, those brave old times for every gentleman who possessed a steel shirt, a horse, a sword, and a truculent disposition; in so much as he

ran no risk in laying hands upon his neighbour's goods and "sticking to them" further than meeting some other ruffian stronger and more truculent than himself, and with similar light-hearted views as regarded mine and thine.

Family tradition told that those first Wrexforths had to fight hard for the lands they had seized, but that having in due time built their stronghold, they speedily betook themselves to reprisals, and joined gaily in the game of "Grab who grab can" so much in vogue amongst those early barons.

They had always taken rank amongst the leading families in the country, but Tom Wrexford, their present representative could perhaps claim to be more popular than any one of his predecessors. He resided by far the greater part of the year at the Grange, and was in all respects a model country gentleman; he subscribed liberally to the hounds, although, unless they met in his own immediate neighbourhood, he seldom cared to even go and see them throw off. He was liberal with regard to his shooting, although it was not often he carried a gun himself. A courteous, high-bred gentleman and on the best of terms with all his friends, but the passion of his life was horse-racing, and yet there were men who would tell you Tom Wrexford was not on the turf. He was not in some senses, he had not a horse in training, and was seldom seen in the precincts of the betting-ring. His face

was well known in the yard at Tattersall's, but never seen in the subscription-room. Still no figure was more familiar by the ring side, at the great sales at Newmarket and Doncaster than his; a bidder hard to stop when he had set his heart upon the blood, and fancied a mare for stud purposes. A good judge too of horses when running, and jubilant as any plunger of them all, when one of his own breeding got home in front for a big race.

There are few men who have not their crosses to bear in this world, and one serious disappointment to Tom Wrexford was that he had no son to succeed him. Generations sometimes repeat themselves, and as he himself had been an only son with two sisters, so had his own family been the same. He had married a woman to whom he was devotedly attached, she had borne him one son and two daughters, the former had been the first to succumb to a fierce outbreak of scarlet fever at Harrow, and it was always a bitter thought to Wrexford that there was no heir of his loins to succeed to the Grange. He was a just man and a well-to-do man, but he was proud of his descent and resolute to transmit the broad lands of Saxham intact to his successor, subject only to a charge of twenty-five thousand a-piece left to his daughters. But who was to be his successor? And on that point there was not only much speculation amongst the country gentry round about, but also terrible vacillation

and uncertainty in Tom Wrexford's own mind. His choice would seem to lie between his nephews. His sisters had both married well. Mrs. Gauntlett, the eldest, was now a widow, and her only son Robert Gauntlett reigned in his father's stead. Wrexford was very fond of this nephew, who was not only a good sportsman, but as devoted a worshipper of the turf as his uncle himself, but they followed their favourite pastime in very different fashion. Young Gauntlett not only had a string of horses in training at Newmarket, but backed them and other people's too, in a manner that by no means met his uncle's approval. A passion for horse racing was one thing, but reckless gambling over it was another, and rumour declared there was not a bolder plunger on the turf than young Gauntlett, and that he had already dipped pretty deeply into his inheritance.

Still, fond though he might be of Rob, Wrexford could not shut his eyes to the fact that the whole of the Saxham property would stand a fair chance of coming to the hammer, should it pass into the hands of such a gambler as Gauntlett. True, some of his father's old friends declared that "Robby's head was screwed on the right way, that he was only afflicted by the vanity and swagger of youth and thought it quite the correct thing just now to bet in 'monkeys instead of ponies,' but that like old Jack Gauntlett before him, he would cut his

wisdom teeth before long, and pull up before it was too late." Tom Wrexford only shook his head at such suggestions, and replied—that "he only wished he could see some signs of it," still, much as he disapproved of his nephew's doings, he could not help liking and being proud of the young fellow. He was full of fun and high spirits, and a favourite with nearly all who knew him. He made light of his own reverses. No man could take his disappointments—and they were many—more gaily than Robby Gauntlett.

His other nephew was of very different pattern; he was eminently steady and respectable, a case of an old head on young shoulders, a shrewd, hard-working fellow who had been brought up with the understanding that he had his own way to make in this world, and had evidently braced himself up for the task.

Henry Curtice had at one time threatened to develope into a prig, but no one would put him down as that now-a-days. He was essentially an astute man of the world, willing to assimilate himself with whatever society hemight chance to be temporarily thrown into; able to converse easily upon most topics of the day, and affecting an interest in them that he was often far from feeling, simply because they were a hobby with his associates of the moment. He mixed a good deal in society, and nobody ever had a word to say against Henry

Curtice. He would probably have been a more popular man, if they had, as his cousin Robby said of him: "Henry's a standing rebuke to us all, he seems so painfully above all our follies and weaknesses that I always feel myself a sinner of the deepest dye after half-an-hour's talk with him, and yet—confound him—to do the fellow justice, he never preaches nor indulges in unpleasant allusions. He don't set up for it, but he always poses as virtue personified. No; Henry is only to be described as 'a most superior person.'"

Mrs. Curtice had married a man who was the head of a large financial business in the City. She was the mother of three sons and two daughters; the eldest of the sons was destined to succeed his father in the business, while Henry had chosen the Bar for a profession. Those best qualified to judge, predicted a brilliant future for the hard-working, clever young barrister, but it had yet to come; and years of weary waiting have been often the lot of our most brilliant advocates. As far as the Saxham property went, Henry was quite aware that he had a chance of coming into it. He knew that his uncle had resolved to make an heir, and his mother had told him that her brother's choice would rest between himself and Robert Gauntlett. Henry was not the man to under-value such a point as this in the game of life, but he had been neither man of the world nor lawyer had he not recognised that,

in the event of one of his daughters marrying a man much to his liking, Tom Wrexford might change his mind, and elect to make an heir of his son-in-law.

Musing dreamily over the probability of his ever becoming its owner, one evening at Saxham Grange, where he was staying on a short visit, it suddenly flashed across him that his cousins, Jenny and Rosie Wrexford, were two pretty, pleasant girls. Why shouldn't he marry one of them, and so combine the joint claims of nephew and son-in-law. He had never thought of marriage before, but it was a thing that came to most men sooner or later, as well sooner perhaps, more especially in a case like his, when it seemed decidedly to his own interest, and his own interest was a thing—to put it mildly—that Henry Curtice was never known to be blind to. He had never thought of his cousins in that way, and for the life of him could not decide which he liked best; they were nice girls, he got on very well with them, but there had never been the semblance of a flirtation between himself and either of them. Well, he must be guided by circumstances; if one wouldn't have him, he supposed the other would. Girls were always anxious to be married, and as long as there was no one before him in the field, he supposed his chance was as good as any one else's.

A shrewd and by no means a diffident young man this, but not versed in the ways and wiles of women,

or he would have known that too much confidence in the beginning, like a lack of it later on, is oft productive of defeat and humiliation.

Although he came to the determination to lay siege to one or other of his cousins in earnest, and without loss of time, yet Henry Curtice did not commence operations upon this visit. He had a general invitation to the Grange, and it was easy to run down from London whenever he might find it convenient, and though he was much too zealous a worker to run the risk of being out of the way while there was a chance of business coming to his chambers, still he was fain to admit that he had more time on his hands than he could have wished at present. How could he better utilize it, he argued with himself, than by courting his cousin, while his profession still left him leisure for that purpose? A hard, unsympathetic nature, with a heart as yet untouched by woman, though perhaps quite capable of strong affection when she shall once come who possesses the key to it. A strong man, who had marked out his path in life, who knew what he wanted, and was therefore likely to attain it. To a resolute man with a set purpose, the desire of his heart is apt to come in due course.

CHAPTER II.

"THE SQUIRE'S RETURN."

A LOVELY afternoon, about the middle of September, hardly a sign of Autumn's russet tints as yet to be seen upon the trees. The sinking sun yet glistens upon the red gables of Saxham Grange, on the steps of which two girls are standing watching the drive that leads up to the house—sisters evidently, from the likeness between them, but Jenny Wrexford, the elder, is taller, and although no brunette, of darker tints than her sister.

"Surely Papa's due now?" exclaimed the younger; "why tarry the wheels of his chariot?"

"Trains, my dear, don't always keep time, especially in these parts. I told Jacob to take 'West Kent' in the dogcart, but although the dear old horse can do a great deal to make up for the delinquencies of the railway, I'm afraid they've set him a task beyond his powers this time. Papa always does come back when he says he will, but it is possible, you know, that he did not leave Doncaster till this morning."

"What fun, Jin, if he brought Rob Gauntlett me with him! He was sure to be there, and tting too, no doubt, in a way he shouldn't. I do Rob, don't you? He is such fun in the house.

Papa shakes his head and says he'll come to grief, but the bad boys are always the nicest, don't you think so?"

"I don't know about that," replied her sister, laughing, "but one certainly don't come across many young men with the go and unflagging spirits of Rob. To use his own expression, he's 'a whole team and a dog under the waggon.'"

"Yes; he's very different from Henry Curtice. Upon my word, if one didn't see him at dinner, one might almost forget he's in the house."

"Don't be unjust, Rosie. Henry's a very good fellow, though quiet, and always makes himself pleasant. He's clever, too, and will be a great lawyer some of these days—a man we shall have to look up to, my dear, as an honour to the family. What should you think of being cousin to a Lord Chancellor?"

"Not much," replied Rose, with a shrug of her shoulders; "I think I should find Rob the much more useful cousin of the two, unless, indeed, those odious Sherringham girls drove me mad with their airs, and then I own it would be rather soothing to hurl 'my cousin the Lord Chancellor' at their heads."

"Poor Henry!" said Miss Wrexford; "they say no man's a prophet in his own country. I suppose no one is ever of great account among his own kindred. But, look, look—here comes the dog-cart!"

"Yes, there's no mistaking West Kent's trot, and Papa's in it, or at all events there are two people."

Another minute or two and Tom Wrexford pulled up the dark brown, nearly thoroughbred horse he was driving, jumped out of the cart, and was immediately clasped in the arms of his daughters.

"We're delighted to get you back again," exclaimed Rosie, as she kissed him. "Did you have a good time? Have you bought anything? I know you sold all the yearlings in July. Did you see Rob Gauntlett, and why didn't you bring him back with you?"

"One question at a time, you gipsy," replied her father laughing. "I didn't bring Rob back with me, because he wouldn't come; however, he has promised to run down for a few days next month. I don't know what will be the end of it all, but the way these young fellows gamble over the racing now-a-days must end in a smash all round; I can only hope poor Rob will be amongst the few who will escape; and now where's your mother?" and followed by his daughters, the Squire made his way to the pretty morning room which was Mrs. Wrexford's favourite haunt.

His wife came forward to greet him with a loving smile as he entered the room. "You're very good, Tom," she said, "you never disappoint me. Now, girls, get your father some tea, or—what will you have, I'm sure you must be famished, and it's nearly two hours to dinner yet."

It was a fixed idea with Mrs. Wrexford, that let who would arrive at the Grange, the visitor was always in an advanced stage of famine, but the squire having declined anything further than a cup of tea, she sat down, as did his daughters, to listen quietly to an account of his proceedings.

“Yes,” he said, “I had a very pleasant time of it, I always do enjoy the Doncaster week, and what’s more, I’ve won a little money, which I don’t always do; and there’s a few pounds for you young women to spend on gauds and fripperies.”

A silent but affectionate hug was Rosie’s comment upon this announcement.

“I did good business, too; picked up a filly rather cheap owing to her having a pair of fore legs which no trainer who knows his business could ever expect to stand training, but she’s a rare bred one all the same. I stayed in the old lodgings, and we had pretty near the same party we have had for the last twenty years. Of course, I saw Rob Gauntlett, and though I don’t pretend to know exactly what he does, I’m very much afraid he plunges terribly—it’s in the blood, you know. Poor Jack, his father, always had an itch for gambling, and they bet much more heavily now than they did in his day. As for Rob, he’s a good loser, and however hard he might be hit you would never see it in his face. What do you think the young villain’s done now?” and the Squire paused provokingly and broke into a low

laugh at the anxious faces of his audience. “Uncle Tom,” he said to me, “you haven’t run a horse since you were a young man, just as if you weren’t a young man still.” Mrs. Wrexford smiled, and it was evident that this little piece of flattery would go far to earn a pardon for that peccant nephew of hers, whatever his crime. “‘You must run a horse once more. I picked up a nicish colt of your own breeding the other day. I am entering three or four for the Cæsarewitch and I have entered Bobadil in your name.’ ‘What!’ I exclaimed, ‘Bobadil by Munchausen! I’m afraid you’ve made a bad bargain. He was a very nice-looking yearling, but he don’t seem able to win races.’

“‘No,’ replied Rob, ‘but my trainer thinks there’s something to be done with him and advised me to buy—his idea is, that the people we bought him from made a mistake about the colt, that they were always running him for short cuts while staying is his game.’

“However, the long and short of it is that you will see Mr. Thomas Wrexford names Bobadil for one of the two great handicaps for next month, and if you do, remember, you have no cause to be frightened, for Thomas Wrexford has no pecuniary interest in the transaction.”

“Oh, what a shame, papa, cried Rose, “you really ought to have a share in the transaction; why, just consider you’ve bred and named it, really in justice

to two poor country maidens you ought to share in the winnings."

"And how, pray, about the losings?" asked her father.

"Now don't refer to so improbable and disagreeable a possibility," retorted the girl with a saucy toss of her head, "we don't breed Bobadils and name Bobadils, save to win."

"Aye, but remember Bobadil and his sire Munchausen were terrible liars."

"But even they tell the truth sometimes, and I feel sure that Bobadil is about to make amends for past behaviour. He will run honest and do his best this time. Remember when it's all over, that I, Rose Wrexford, told you so."

The ladies of the Grange were by no means steeped in the slang of the race-course, indeed, perhaps Mrs. Wrexford was more cognisant of Turf matters than either of her daughters, still it was not likely that two quick-witted girls could grow up without some knowledge of their surroundings. Fond of his home and family, the Squire took the greatest interest in all their pursuits, and his daughters, who were devoted to their father, although they sometimes teased him about his pet hobby, were pretty constant visitors to the Paddocks, and followed the career of such young things as the Squire predicted a glorious future for, attentively. But juvenile prodigies as we all know often turn out

very commonplace men; Senior Wranglers and winners of the Newdegate are very often heard of no more, and these high priced yearlings, from which so much is expected, make at times but a sorry show on a race-course, and from thence descend into utter obscurity.

Now Bobadil was one of these disappointments. Tom Wrexford thought him quite "the pick of the basket" the year he sent him along with his other youngsters to Newmarket for sale; he fetched a long price, and the following spring at Ascot there was quite a *furor* about him for the Maiden Plate, but the layers of "odds on" pulled long faces almost before the race was over, for at no time did the favourite ever seem able to take part in the struggle; still his followers never blenched, he was so good-looking and had cost so much money that his day must come, and again and again during his two year old career they stood staunchly to their guns and backed him to recover their losses only to experience fresh reverses. Then the public changed their opinion, pronounced him a brute, a handsome impostor not worth keeping in training. His owner, utterly disgusted with him, was only too glad to take about a fourth of what he had given for him from Rob Gauntlett, and piously thanked Providence that the stock of foolish young men had not as yet run out.

In good truth Gauntlett himself had rather

hesitated about buying the colt, but he had great confidence in his trainer's judgment. Then, it was one of his uncle's breeding, and he knew the squire had entertained a high opinion of him as a yearling; still so far his racing record scarce bore inspection, one victory out of several attempts as a two-year-old, and two more defeats that year gave little promise of Bobadil ever making a name in turf history, while at Saxham Grange the ladies had long ceased to follow his career, and even the Squire had come to think that, in the capacity of a race-horse, Bobadil was better under the turf than on it.

While dressing for dinner that evening, Tom Wrexford, whose dressing-room opened on to his wife's room, fidgetted in and out a good deal.

"I'm troubled in my mind about Rob Gauntlett; it's a pity, it's a terrible pity, he's such a nice young fellow. I've always loved him almost as though he'd been my own son, but I'm sadly afraid he's going pell mell to the devil. There's no mistake that he's making ducks and drakes of his property. I got a letter the other day from his mother, imploring me to interfere. What am I to do? He's five-and-twenty and his own master. I've no control over him, and young fellows of that age don't like being preached to, even by fathers on whom they are dependent, much less by uncles upon whom they are not."

"Oh, Tom," interposed his wife, "he'll listen to

you. Rob's a good-hearted boy, and good-tempered beside."

"Yes, I know," replied the Squire, testily, "I know he's good-tempered and well-meaning and all the rest of it, and that he'll get wiser in time and settle down and all that, but what's the use of it when he's run through every acre of Cranby and's a ruined man?"

"Reason with him, Tom ; I'm sure he'll listen to you, he thinks so much of you, and about this racing business he looks upon it that there's no such authority."

"It's all very well, Margaret, but we shall only finish by quarrelling, and I'm too fond of the boy to do that. If I can't save him, I can at least be a friend to him."

"But, Tom," said his wife, in a low voice, "you forget that you have some hold upon him besides his affection for you. When we lost our own poor boy, you said that you would make an heir, that you didn't hold with girls having the control of landed property, and that after providing for Jenny and Rose, you should leave Saxham to one of your nephews. Everyone knows the estate is unentailed and recollect you made no secret of your intentions at the time. The possible reversion of Saxham is not a thing that any young man would wilfully throw away."

"Margaret," said Tom Wrexford, warmly, "you

don't do Rob justice. I don't think he's ever given a thought about coming into Saxham, and I'm quite sure would much rather see me at the Grange than step into my shoes, besides, however fond I may be of him, I shall certainly never leave Saxham to a confirmed gambler. I couldn't rest in my grave if I thought the dear old place in which we've all lived time out of mind, was going, like Cranby, to the Jews. It would be far safer in the hands of Henry Curtice."

"Well, never mind about that, Tom. Please God you'll rule at the Grange for many a long day yet, and lay me to rest before you leave it, but I implore you to speak to Rob."

"It will do no good, but I suppose I ought. I'll think it over. He's coming here next month. I suppose, by the way, it would have been more prudent not to have asked him."

"No; why?" said Mrs. Wrexford, "we're always glad to have him here."

"You don't think there's anything between him and either of the girls, do you?"

"Why you used to say you hoped he would take a fancy to one of them," exclaimed his wife, a little astonished.

"True, I did," replied the Squire, "but Rob's reckless behaviour of late has made me change my mind on that point. You surely don't think there's anything between him and Jenny, do you?"

"Oh, no, Jenny, I fancy, is heart-whole, but I think it would be as well, on Rosie's account, that after this next visit, Rob shouldn't come here quite so often."

"Why, the little monkey is hardly grown up yet, far too young to think of anything of that sort."

"The little monkey," laughed Mrs. Wrexford, "is eighteen, and has been quite capable of thinking of that sort of thing for the last two or three years. I don't suppose there's much harm done yet, but now I know your wishes, I will take care that such an idea meets with no encouragement. It is a little unlucky you should have asked Rob just now, after giving us an account of his wrong doings. Rose is just the girl to pity him for his reverses, and feel rather proud of his naughtiness, besides, this business of Bobadil's will keep her mind full of him. From the way you tell me Rob bets, if that noble animal is supposed to have a chance, it won't be long, I fancy, before we see his name figuring amongst the betting quotations in the daily paper."

"See his name!" exclaimed the Squire, "it's a matter of etiquette not to publish such things in the papers until the weights are out, but it's perfectly well known amongst racing men that he's been backed a bit already."

CHAPTER III.

“BOBADIL.”

“WELL, what devilment are you fellows hatching?” exclaimed Charlie Rooke as he crossed the smoking-room of the “*Heliotrope*” to a corner where three or four of his intimate friends were gathered together in rather earnest conversation. “You remind me of the Conspirators’ Chorus in *Madame Angot*,” and he hummed the well-known refrain:

“When folks combine to intrigue and plot,
And boldly swear they will falter not.”

“There’s not much conspiring about us, we’re only speculating as to how long Robby Gauntlett will last,” said one of the men addressed, who was holding an evening paper in his hand.

“Ah,” rejoined Rooke gravely, “that I’m afraid is a mere question of time; he’s a good fellow too, and no fool, but he never ought to have taken to betting; he’s too impulsive, not cool enough. As the fellow says in one of Bret Harte’s stories—‘He can’t gamble worth a cent.’ What’s he been doing now?”

“Why,” rejoined Lyster, “you remember that night last week in the Subscription Room at

Doncaster, when he took ten thousand to a thousand about his lot for the Cæsarewitch."

"Perfectly; that fellow Barnes laid it him. I don't like that beggar, he affects to be a gentleman, and not a professional, and lays remarkably short odds on the strength of it."

"That's the man," returned Lyster. "Well, here are the weights," and Lyster pointed to the paper in his hand, "and what do you suppose has been announced at the foot of them? 'All Mr. Gauntlett's horses out of the Cæsarewitch.'"

"No," exclaimed Rooke, "you don't mean to say he scratched the crowd, why he must have wired to Weatherby as soon as he saw the weights. Has the Admiral been very hard upon his nags?"

"I think he has," returned Lyster; "nobody can say they are well in, but for all that I should have seen it out and had a run for that thousand pound."

"Yes, but this is Gauntlett all over, this is just what he would do; he always acts on the spur of the moment, instead of taking time to consider things. Yes," he continued, as he took the paper from Lyster, "the handicapper has been a bit rough upon him, still, though not well in, Saracen can hardly be said to be out of it. At all events, I should have let him try if he couldn't save me that thousand."

"Of course, and so would anyone else," replied Lyster. "It's just a bit of temper on Gauntlett's

part, and racing's a game that you can't afford to lose that at."

"Not much," replied Rooke sententiously, as he dropped into the seat next his chum, and, their comments all made upon Rob Gauntlett's imprudences, the conversation turned upon other things.

In good sooth Gauntlett was in sore need of guidance at this present. As Rooke had said of him, he was no fool, but a man need not be that, and all the same do very foolish things. The fool upon these occasions has, I think, the best of it; he makes bitter moan, perhaps, over the consequences of his folly, but he is not stung with the remorse that is the lot of him who committed his foolishness with his eyes open. Gauntlett honestly loved racing, he had means to thoroughly indulge in that pastime without hurting himself, if only he would bet in proportion to his means. You may be a very bad player, and yet pass a good deal of your time at the whist-table without hurting yourself if you play for shilling points; make the points high enough and six months will probably see you ruined. Gauntlett saw all this, and no one knew better than himself what would probably be the end of it all, but a species of false shame possessed him. His associates were chiefly young men of good means, and amongst this set it was considered *infra dig.* to bet except in large sums. They affected a contemptuous pity for people who won a

race without winning a large stake over it; they stigmatised it as funkng. A common saying amongst them was: "If you don't really mean betting, what's the use of pretending to bet?" and vied with each other in the extravagance of their outlays. That the Ring were quick to administer to a rivalry of this description was only natural, it made business brisk, and during the few years that mad emulation lasted the fortunes of that devoted band passed chiefly into the hands of the book-makers. Gauntlett, indeed, was deeper dipped than even the squire suspected. He was sick of all the feverish excitement in which he now lived; he knew that he enjoyed racing more in the days before he came into his inheritance, and when he was content with a modest wager now and again; but his pride forbade his breaking the chains that bound him. He could not bear his associates should think that he was beat; men under like circumstances usually conceal that they are getting near the end of their tether, and then in the days of our novitiate it's wonderful how learned we think ourselves about the mysteries of the Turf. The vanity of youth leads us to state our opinion in *ex-cathedrâ* fashion; as we grow older we meekly admit our ignorance, or at most venture to observe that we think such and such a horse will run well. It's about this latter period that race-goers perhaps win a little money.

As Rooke rightly surmised, Gauntlett had struck his horses out of the Cæsarewitch in a fit of anger at the weights apportioned to them. He had not conferred with old Isaac Martin, his trainer, but in a fit of indignation at what he considered the unfair burdens laid upon them, sent a brief but peremptory message to put the pen through their names. It was not often that he did anything of the sort without duly talking it over with Martin, but this time he had acted upon his own judgment, and the trainer was as much taken aback as anybody else when he read the announcement in the papers.

Clever and capable in his business was old Isaac Martin, as any of his craft. A slight, wizened, wiry, little, old man, with a face something like a ferret's, and who had, perhaps, had a finger in as many Turf villainies as any man who ever trod Newmarket Heath, and yet there was no record against him to that effect, nor had he ever fallen under the ban of the Turf Senate, but for all that he'd somehow acquired a shady reputation. He did not pride himself upon winning the great three year old contests of the year or trouble himself much about "weight for age" races. His speciality was handicaps, and about these he displayed such patience and astuteness that his name was quite a proverb with regard to this sort of contest; to discover which was the best of old Martin's lot was

always a puzzle that severely exercised the racing public whenever a big handicap was about to be decided; and difficult to discover as under which of three thimbles the pea may be hid. Isaac was a man honest, according to his lights, but then he took a peculiar view of that virtue. The first person it behoved him to be honest to, he considered was — Isaac Martin. He was desirous that his employers should make money, and had no objection to the public picking up some of the crumbs of the golden banquet when everybody was served, but it must be rigidly borne in mind—that he, Isaac Martin, had to be helped first. Gauntlett had been warned against placing his horses in Isaac's hands by several of his friends, the old man had the reputation of being a somewhat shifty customer, and clever though he was his services were by no means in general request. Even the Squire expostulated, and told his nephew that he could never expect to do any good while his horses were in the hands of such a man as Martin. "I tell you," said Tom Wrexford emphatically, "he couldn't run straight if he tried. He doesn't know how." To which Rob replied gaily:

"My dear Uncle, I know he's got the reputation of being a bit of a robber, but nobody ever alleges anything definite against him. I think he's more sinned against than sinning."

"It's no use talking to you, Rob, if you believe

that; the leopard changing his spots is a transformation that I, at all events, put no faith in."

"Well, you see Uncle, he's rather at low water just now. I always deal liberally with him when he wins, he's every incentive to keep straight, and you must admit that no one knows his business better."

"Oh, yes," replied the Squire, "he thoroughly knows his work, and I can only hope will falsify my convictions."

So far Martin had proved a thorough good servant to young Gauntlett. He had made the most of the small string of horses intrusted to him, shown great judgment in placing them, and carried off a fair sprinkling of races. His advice, too, had been sound, and more than once his master had regretted following his own opinion instead of his trainer's. Isaac Martin was certainly desirous of doing the best he could for Gauntlett in his own way; he was a liberal employer, and left the control of his horses pretty much to Martin, and all this suited the trainer thoroughly; but he was still faithful to that first principle of his—that when there was a cake to be cut up he, Isaac Martin, was to have the first and biggest slice. It was not upon his own horses that Gauntlett had lost so heavily, but in backing those of other people. When the day after that conversation, already recorded, at the Heliotrope, the old trainer read in the paper that

announcement about the horses in his charge, he was thunderstruck.

"Well," he remarked grimly, "I can train horses but I can't manage fools: that sort of high-mindedness don't suit my book, and I suppose Mr. Gauntlett would tell me he did it in the interest and for the good of the public. Confound the public!—they don't pay the trainer's bill, and are always interfering. Blest if I don't think they fancy horses are kept for their amusement, and that they've more right to say whether they're to run or not than the owners! What business have owners either interfering in this sort of thing? If they'd just leave it all to us, and then do what we tell' em, they wouldn't get broke over it in the way they do. It makes me sick to see such tom-foolery as this. Why, Mr. Gauntlett ought to have known that the public always do back my horses, and that if the weights were a little too high, there were some nice pickings to be had by laying against them for the next three or four weeks. D——n it! it is interfering with my perquisites, that's what it is!"

Now Martin had been for some time a good deal perturbed in his own mind as to what he had better do about Gauntlett. As before said, up to this he had dealt very fairly by him, but it did not require the veteran's experience to tell him that when a man gambled as his master did, he would be certain

to collapse before long. He felt sure that his employment would soon be over, and under these circumstances it behoved him to take care of Isaac Martin, and lay his hands upon all he could out of the wreck. He must make money whilst he had the opportunity, not particularly at the expense of young Gauntlett, but emphatically he must make money. It would be more to his interest to keep Gauntlett on his legs, but he felt that was impossible. There was nothing for it but to do the best he could for himself under the circumstances. He had been up at Doncaster with two or three of his master's horses, and had heard of the big bet that Gauntlett had accepted about Martin's lot for the Cæsarewitch, and had grumbled a good deal at what he deemed the folly of it.

“Why, he might be sure a bet like that will come to the handicapper's ears, and induce him to put about seven pound more on every horse of the lot. The public putting on their little ventures is bad enough, but for a representative of the stable to put the money down like that before the weights are out is sheer madness.” But if the old man had growled in this way at Doncaster, it pleased him now to take a somewhat different view. As he ran his eye over the handicap, he muttered to himself: “It might have been worse, they're not well in perhaps, not likely, but for all that they'd have been fancied a bit by the public and now the dashed

fool has gone and struck 'em all out without waiting to hear what I had to say about it. It's heart breaking work to manage horses for such a pig-headed young donkey."

At Saxham too the publication of the first of the great back end handicaps had been received with much interest, and not a little surprise. In the parlour of the "Marquis of Granby" where the leading denizens of the little village were wont to assemble of an evening under the presidency of John Crowder and discuss racing matters generally, there was much curiosity evoked at seeing amongst the entries a horse in the Squire's name. It was years since he had done such a thing, and "What had induced him to do it now?" puzzled them extremely. They knew all about Bobadil, a few of them had even seen him before he left the Grange Paddocks, they knew that he'd been sold as usual at the Squire's annual sale, and knew that great things had been expected of him which so far he had utterly failed to realize. How had the Squire become possessed of him again, and what had led him to put the horse into the Cæsarewitch? he must have had some grounds to go upon. Bobadil had certainly run a bad horse so far, but the Squire would never have bought him back and entered him for a big race, unless he had thought him better than his performances warranted. Mr. Thomas Wrexford's Bobadil, 3 years old, 7 stone, read well

enough, if he was a good colt, which, however, there was every reason to doubt; but Saxham had a great opinion of the master of the Grange's judgment, he had bred the colt, had seen him run, etc.

"He knows his way about does the Squire," said old John Crowder with a wink at his appreciative audience. "You would have to get up pretty early in the morning to teach him anything about racing. 'Tisn't likely a man like him would have bought that there colt back unless in his opinion he'd fallen into bad hands and been messed about, and I tell ye, gentleman, what I mean to do, I shall just put all the horse's previous running a one side and back him, and dal it all, if next time I see the Squire he tells me he fancies his chance I shall back it again." And John Crowder brought his fist down with a bang upon the table, and looked round at his auditors as if ready to invest the whole stock and goodwill of the "Marquis of Granby" in support of his opinion, should any one presume to differ with him.

But Saxham always stood staunchly by Saxham bred horses, and when one of these was named by the Squire himself, Saxham was bound as our cousins say "to go its bottom dollar on the result." Then had not John Crowder, the village oracle, pronounced his implicit faith in Bobabil, and warned them to take no notice of that animal's so far undistinguished career, and when that worthy invited

them to have glasses round at his expense, to drink success to Bobadil, enthusiasm reached its height. The toast, coupled with the health of Squire Wrexford, was drunk with loud applause, and an equally loudly expressed determination "to be on Bobabil to a man."

CHAPTER IV.

BARNES THE BOOKMAKER.

TWENTY years hence, said the old curiosity dealer in one of Miss Braddon's stories, when derided for having a mummy amongst his heterogeneous collections, twenty years hence and every provincial town will have established a museum, and no museum will be complete without a mummy. Consequently there will be a brisk demand for mummies, and that closely-swathed old gentleman will be worth two or three times what he is at present. Alas for human foresight, we have opened up the land of the Pharoahs since then and mummies, at present, are a drug in the market. A quarter of a century ago and the landed interest would hardly have believed had they been warned of the evil days in store for them.

A quarter of a century ago and the racing was as different from that of to-day as if it had been almost another pastime. In those times we had horses that could stay and also did they keep

running for some few years. Now the number of our horses that can get over a mile are limited, and their second or third season sees most of them used up. Great, too, has the revolution been in the mode of betting. In the days of which I am writing, speculation was carried on over a big race almost as soon as the nominations were made. No sooner was a Derby over than men began to bet upon the next, but now betting is chiefly confined to the few days immediately preceding the contest, and a long distance race seems as much out of vogue as trunk hose or the small sword.

At a well-known tavern, just east of Temple Bar, were seated four men at dinner. Men well attired, and judging from their somewhat luxurious meal, well endowed with this world's goods. Men who, without doubt, claimed the status of gentlemen, but who had hardly been accorded the title by the class to which they affected to belong. There was just a little something about them, the slight swaggering self-assertion that always indicates a doubtful position, while any man experienced in the ways of the metropolis would have been chary about taking a hand at cards with, or feeling over confident in his ability to beat, any of them at billiards if there was much money on the game. The dark, florid-complexioned individual who appeared to be the presiding spirit of the party, a physiognomist would have undoubtedly pronounced to belong to the

predatory class. He had the keen, cold, hard eye characteristic of those who prey upon their fellows. He was apparently the giver of the feast and seemed in high good humour with himself and those about him.

“What luck you always have, Barnes,” exclaimed one of his guests, as he tossed off a bumper of champagne, “to have won a thousand pound right off the reel. It’s a nice beginning to your Cæsarewitch ‘book.’”

“It’s not all luck, Raynor,” replied Horace Barnes gaily. “If you come to think of it, I’d got two or three pulls when I made that bet at Doncaster. To begin with, it was publicly laid, and I needn’t say I took pretty good care that it was well talked of during the week; that,” he continued with a wink, “was not likely to improve Gauntlett’s chances of having his horses well handicapped. Secondly, you must all know as well as I do what a hot-headed young fool he is. Of course it was impossible to foresee that Gauntlett would strike all his horses out in a fit of anger, but there’s always the chance that a fellow like that will throw the game away somehow or other.”

“I see,” exclaimed another of the *convives*, called Shelton, “that Squire Wrexford has named Bobadil. Is that the man whose yearlings always fetch such long prices at the July sales?”

“Yes,” replied Barnes. “I should think so. I’ve

never known him do such a thing since I've been about. Bobadil—that's the horse in Powell's stable. I forget who he belongs to. Stop—Green, isn't it?"

Shelton nodded assent.

"Well it don't much matter, or else he'd be rather a good horse for us, if he should win. Mr. Wrexford don't bet, and the chances are we shall never be even asked to lay against that one. Seven stone!—the brute couldn't win with a postage stamp on his back."

"Yes, it was a nice bet, a very nice bet," observed Raynor, a young man who, having got through the best part of his own money, was now rapidly developing from the pigeon to the rook under the auspices of Barnes, for whom he had unbounded admiration.

Mr. Horace Barnes, indeed, was the only one of the party who really had the position they all claimed, but he had been a *mauvais sujet* from his youth up, and had now deteriorated considerably. His sojourn at the University had not redounded to his credit; even as a boy, the truth was not in him, and amongst his companions he'd attained the reputation of being rather unscrupulous about the rights of property. That he should take to gambling at the earliest opportunity was only what might have been expected. Newmarket was in the immediate vicinity of Cambridge, and he contrived

to pay many a visit to the famous heath. But the circumstance that had occasioned his abrupt retirement from the University was the card-playing in which he and his set indulged so freely. This ended in a tremendous explosion, in which Barnes and another man were plainly accused by their fellow gamblers of unfair practices. The thing created so much stir, that it reached the ears of the authorities and had Horace Barnes not taken his name off the books of his college with much promptitude, he would, in all likelihood, have been expelled the University for card-sharping. From that out, he began the life of a man about town, of that kind who, having no regular profession or pursuit, get their living principally by their wits. The stigma that attended his Cambridge career, although now well-nigh forgotten, in those first few years drove him into dubious society. He was speedily known in the sporting world, and was to be seen at every resort near London where there was a possibility of making a little money by betting. No matter what the particular branch of the sport might be, Barnes was sure to be there. He had gone on gradually accumulating money, though by what means it would perhaps be as well not to enquire too closely. Of late years he had been a well-known figure in Tattersall's Ring, and though not popular with his brethren of the mystic circle, was quite recognised as one of themselves. If not one of the magnates

of the ring, Horace Barnes was still a man whose book was usually made on a large scale. There were, however, some veterans of the fraternity who said that Barnes was rather too dashing a bettor to last, and prophesied that he would some day be hit so hard as to be sore put to it to weather the storm. Be that as it may, at the present moment he was prosperous, overbearing and confident as need be.

If ever there was a fallacy in this world it is—
“That hawks do not pick out hawk’s eyes.”

Amongst Mr. Barnes’s boon companions there was no affectation of mock sentiment, they combined together as beasts of prey will occasionally do, to hunt down a quarry ; but, as a rule, they preferred to keep their victims to themselves, feeling great reluctance to share such quill feathers as they might pluck from the innocent within their clutches.

Shelton had quite as keen an eye for business as Barnes himself ; he did not understand it at present, but he was far sighted as a vulture for any possibility of plunder. He never gave anybody credit for doing anything without a motive, “and the same with intent to deceive.” What had suddenly made Mr. Wrexford depart from the habit of years and name such a horse as Bobadil for a big race was a thing he felt that must be inquired into. How, again, came Mr. Wrexford to have anything to say to a colt which

was, as Shelton believed, in a stable with which that gentleman had no connection? If he could get at the rights of all this, Shelton thought there might be something to be made out of it, and that being a thing about which, as long as it doesn't involve hard work, "gentry" of his kind are deeply interested, he made a mental note of all this for future investigation.

We need not linger with Mr. Barnes and his unsavoury companions. Their talk was calculated to give any one who might happen to overhear it the lowest possible opinion of turf morality. According to them, all owners and trainers, not to speak of jockeys, were rogues, and a race was very seldom decided on the real merits of the horses engaged, which being interpreted, meant that they judged mankind by themselves, and when things did not turn out in the manner they expected, were quite convinced that it was the result of foul play. Utterly ignoring the fact that horses are not machines and as apt to be out of sorts and suffer from infirmities of temper as ourselves.

Although Isaac Martin, in his disgust at seeing the announcement that Mr. Gauntlett's horses were struck out of the Cæsarewitch, had, after one glance at the weights apportioned to them, thrown aside the paper, it was not to be supposed, his indignation once got over, that the veteran would refrain from studying the handicap, and then he at

once discovered that Bobadil was entered in Mr. Wrexford's name, and was consequently not included in Gauntlett's directions. What did it mean? he was quite as puzzled as Shelton at this discovery. Was this sheer artfulness? Was the design not to call attention to Bobadil, whose name, as belonging to such a heavy bettor as Mr. Gauntlett, would be jealously watched in the market, while as Mr. Wrexford's he would hardly attract attention? Who had hit upon this idea—surely it couldn't be Mr. Gauntlett's? No, he felt sure his master would never have thought of such a ruse as this. No, it must have been Mr. Wrexford's. He knew the Squire was Gauntlett's uncle, and he had known him for many years, had met him at the sale ring side constantly, and on the race course, and knew that though he never ran horses now, no man was more thoroughly versed in the mysteries of the Turf. Bobadil had been bought at Martin's instigation, and though he had still a good deal to find out about him, yet the colt had improved immensely since he'd been in his hands and was, he felt sure, a great deal better than he was given credit for. He had never done well with Powell, and was probably a colt of late development. What had attracted old Martin's attention to him, was his unexpectedly winning over a mile, which had hitherto been considered a little beyond his distance. He came of stout blood, and the veteran

thought a mistake had been made in gauging his capabilities; and lastly, old Martin held a very poor opinion of Powell's skill in his vocation. After all, the trainer thought perhaps the best card in their hand was still left to them to play. If Bobadil only went on as he was doing, and turned out in accordance with his hopes, he should be able to do justice both to himself and his master.

Robby Gauntlett little thought what a disturbance he was going to make in racing circles, when he hastily struck his horses out of the Cæsarewitch. He was very disgusted with the world generally, but more particularly with himself, just at present. He had awoke to the fact that he had fallen in love with his cousin Rose, and if he had not made such a fool of himself, knew that if he could only persuade the young lady to consent, he might have had a very reasonable chance of obtaining his uncle's acquiescence in their engagement. The Squire, beyond a few hints to be more cautious in his speculations, had never lectured him, but he had heard his uncle inveigh bitterly about the folly of such reckless plunging as was then the fashion. To ask his cousin's hand would involve a disclosure of his own affairs, and how was he on such an occasion to confess that he was more than half ruined. He shrank from looking into his affairs himself, much more submitting them to his cool, clear-headed uncle. He knew the Squire had

rather strong opinions on the subject of gambling, and was not likely to entrust his daughter to any one with a passion for that popular vice. He was going down to Saxham in three weeks, but it was no use, he would never be allowed to marry his cousin. What a fool he had been. He had gambled away not only his property, but the heart he'd fondly hoped he'd half won. Ah, yes, it isn't only the players, but there are a good many hearts broken, and salt tears shed to boot when men play for high stakes.

So far Gauntlett had never even given Bobadil a thought, since half in jest, he had entered the colt in Mr. Wrexford's name. He had had him a very short time, and knew next to nothing about him.

During a brief gleam of sunshine in his Turf career, old Martin had persuaded him to buy the colt, but it had not started since becoming his property, and he was quite unaware as yet that the trainer was well satisfied with the new purchase.

CHAPTER V.

“RECKONING HIS CHANCES.”

It happened to be a remarkably fine Autumn, and even Henry Curtice as he raised his head ever and again from the tough law books with which he was wrestling, and glanced out from the windows of his chambers in the Temple over the dancing waters of

the river, felt a strong inclination to pitch the books to “Old Harry” and rush out into the sunshine and revel in the glorious weather. That impulse no doubt comes to many of us at such times, but the working machinery, of which we form a spindle, cannot be put out of gear just because it’s a fine day and we would rather play. Sticking closely to the profession of his adoption, Curtice had contented himself with the mere shadow of a holiday. He had remained in town nearly the whole of the vacation, on the chance of his opportunity coming. He might, he thought, pick up a little business, simply from being in Town while others were not. He had plenty of confidence in his own powers, when his opening should come, but in these early days he knew he must be always on the alert, ready and in the way to take every chance that presented itself; in the meantime the more law he could cram into his head the better. At last he cast one more wistful glance through the open window, then, closing the heavy volume through which he had been plodding the best part of the morning with a bang, jumped up, and decided to go for a good stretch along the embankment, and so through the Park to Kensington Gardens.

Having crossed Piccadilly at Hyde Park Corner, he turned down the almost deserted Row, and was stepping out briskly in the direction of Kensington Gardens, when he was suddenly hailed by a gentle-

man, who was comfortably seated and placidly enjoying his cigar under the trees with :

"How are you, Curtice? Unless you're on business bent, sit down, and let's have a talk. I haven't seen you for ages, a good sign."

Curtice laughed. "I don't know why 'a good sign,'" he replied. "There's nothing going on in my line just now, you know as well as I do."

"Perhaps not," replied Mr. Lyster, "but I've observed that you never see much of a lawyer in great practice, nor of a young one who is on his way to be."

"I hope you're right," said Curtice, "but at present I'm sorry to say I've a good deal of time to spare."

"Not a bit of it," rejoined the other. "What you've got to do now is to stick to just what you're doing. Be always in the way. If a fellow's got any brains, there's nothing like being always in the way."

"Well, I am that," replied Curtice, "but what the deuce brings you to Town this time of year?"

"Want to pick up a horse or two," replied the other sententiously. "Fellow must do something you know, and hunting bores me less than anything else. Meet lots of fellows you know. See some of 'em come croppers, see some of 'em funk and pretend they don't. Yes, there's a great deal of amusement to be got out of the hunting field by a fellow like myself who don't go in for riding."

Mr. Lyster in reality was a very fair horseman, and as a rule held his own when hounds were running, but Jim Lyster was a philosopher of the *nil admirari* school and never professed to be more than tranquilly pleased with anything. “Not so much bored as might have been expected,” was a very favourite comment of his when appealed to for his verdict upon any entertainment he had witnessed. For the rest he was a man you met everywhere and who seemed to know every one, and oddly enough a good deal about them to boot. Yet Jim Lyster was not at all an inquisitive man; not the least given to be curious concerning his friends or acquaintances but he had a retentive memory, and rarely forgot such gossip as he heard.

“I have been down at Tattersall’s to see what I could pick up there, but it’s bad business. There are more buyers than sellers just now. Fellows all seem to want to hunt, you know. Fellows that have kept their horses through the summer don’t seem to see selling them just as the fun’s going to begin. I say, you come of a racing stock don’t you?”

“No, I should hardly say so,” replied Curtice. “My people are business folks in the City.”

“Ah, yes, but what I mean is this—Old Tom Wrexford is an uncle of yours isn’t he?”

“Certainly,” replied Curtice, “but why?”

“Because he’s got a horse in the Cæsarewitch, called Bobadil.”

“What? Uncle Tom. He breeds lots of horses but he never runs them. I don’t know much about racing, but I fancy you must be mistaken.”

“Not a bit of it,” replied the other. “He has just come into the betting. I read in the papers this morning that one thousand to fifteen had been taken about Mr. Wrexford’s Bobadil, and it’s a very odd thing, but I was given a most mysterious tip about that horse this afternoon. I can’t understand it myself, but I’ll tell you all about it. You say you don’t know anything about racing, the sooner you learn the better; recollect there’s more than one famous advocate made his first great score in a horse case. I fancy the more a barrister knows of everything the better. However, to return to my story. I was at Tattersall’s as I told you, trying to pick up a couple of horses. I’ve bought one, which I trust will do me pretty fairly, and there was another that I took a great fancy to, and even bid for, but he was bought in at a price considerably above my figure. But I’d taken a liking for the horse, and was a bit disappointed at not getting him. As he was led away a dealer named Taylor, with whom I’ve had one or two transactions, came up to me and said:

“‘Pity to let him go, Mr. Lyster, he’s just your sort, carry you like a bird, I know all about him and he’s worth every shilling of the money. I bid myself for him after you’d stopped, but he’s gone

beyond my mark as a dealer ; he's worth it to you. Let me go and offer the reserve for him now, I'm sure you'll never repent it.'

“Well, I thanked him, but told him I couldn't afford it for I'd lost a bit of money, racing this year, nothing of any great consequence, but enough to compel me to be economical for the present ; when he said, ‘Just step on one side for a moment, sir, I want to speak to you.’ We walked a little way up the yard towards the Subscription room, and then he stopped and said :

“‘Since Doncaster, I've been away on my business down in Kent, and amongst other places I stopped one night at Saxham. The landlord of the inn is an old friend of mine, and he told me they were all going for Bobadil to a man. The colt was bred down there, and always expected to turn out a flyer. They say the Squire always did believe in him, and never would have named him for the Cæsarewitch if he didn't still. They swear by the Squire down there, I can tell you. I've got a pound or two on it myself. Take my advice ; do the same, and buy the hunter ; before the month is over you'll say you've got the best horse you ever rode, and he won't have cost you a shilling.'

“‘And if Bobadil's beat?’ I replied, for like most men I've had a weary experience of ‘tips.'

“‘I'll guarantee,' said Taylor, ‘that you don't lose twenty pound over the whole business.'

“And now Curtice, I haven’t bought the hunter, and I haven’t backed Bobadil, but thought perhaps you might have heard your uncle say something about it.”

“No, though as a lawyer I’m bound to keep a still tongue, I tell you honestly I know nothing about this. I was down at Saxham about three weeks ago and never heard Bobadil’s name mentioned, but they are not much given to talking racing at the Grange unless Rob Gauntlett’s there.”

“Ah,” replied Lyster, “I don’t suppose there’d be much talk about it then, that was before the weights were out; however, don’t bother your head anything more about it, Bobadil always was a bad horse, and no doubt will remain so to the end of his career. I hope Robby Gauntlett cannot forestall Saxham.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“Well, you see, strictly entailed, he might,” replied Lyster, “fellows when they can’t cut the entail, you know, go in for raising the wind on post obits at cent. per cent.”

“The only inheritance of which you can’t cut the entail is the gout; but everybody knows in the neighbourhood that Saxham is not entailed. My uncle can leave it to whom he likes.”

“So much the better for Rob Gauntlett,” said Lyster, “under those circumstances he can’t well forestall it.”

“You seem to think that Rob is certain to be the Squire’s successor. Well, I suppose you’re right. The water always goes to the river, as the French say.”

Curtice had been more than human if there had not been a slight tinge of bitterness in his tones at finding how completely his own claims were overlooked by a man of the world like Lyster. True, he by no means over-estimated their value, but he felt a little like the man who after unsuccessfully putting into the Derby lottery of his club for forty years, drew a “dead ’un” at last, on finding his chance of Saxham so utterly ignored.

The tone caught Lyster’s ear, who, with all his affectation was remarkably quick of apprehension. “Meaning Rob Gauntlett in this case,” he remarked, “that, by the way, is a river that I’m afraid is in imminent danger of drying up, but, I beg your pardon, my dear Curtice, for poking my nose into your family history; you’re Tom Wrexford’s nephew as well as the other fellow, I mean Robby Gauntlett, you know. Of course, your chance is just as good as his, don’t know why, got it into my head somehow that Rob Gauntlett was heir to Saxham; natural stupidity, I suppose, I always was a remarkably thick-headed fellow.”

“Pray don’t apologise,” said Curtice, smiling, “it’s no secret at all. Everybody in the county knows that my uncle can leave his property where he likes, and beyond that he said openly, a little

after his son's death, that he should make an heir, nothing definite is known as to who will succeed him at the Grange, but you are so far right in your surmise that I should think Rob would be accounted first favourite."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Lyster, "I was mistaken about the thing altogether. I barely know the Squire to speak to; no knowing what a fellow who makes a statement of that sort may do, but I should call it a very open race."

"Meaning that men are often false to their principles when it comes to making their wills. Well, thank heaven he's hale and hearty at present. I'm sure we all hope that he may reign at the Grange for many a year yet."

"Yes," said Lyster, "he's of a sort we can't spare, and now I must be going westward. Good-bye, old man. May the briefs come falling in thick as leaves in Vallambrosa."

And so saying Jim Lyster sauntered off in his usual listless fashion. He was one of those men who'd rather missed his mark in this world from being cursed with a very comfortable competency. There was plenty of pluck and energy under the languid indifference he affected, he'd more than once astonished his associates, when bantered past endurance, by backing himself to perform some athletic feat which they had fancied quite beyond his capabilities.

Little Tommy Lowe, for instance, who fancied himself tremendously as an amateur sprint runner, has never forgotten what a show Lyster made of him at that country house in the Midlands when he backed himself to give Lyster five yards in a hundred, and in the smoking-room over-night the men quite piled the money upon him. As he remarked afterwards ruefully to his Fidus Achates, “Who could have thought that the lazy affected beggar could run?”

From that out, those who knew Jim Lyster held, in spite of his indolent manner, that he was dangerous to stand against whenever he backed himself; and entertained no doubt, should circumstances ever require it, that Lyster would be quite equal to the occasion. A man who as a soldier would have been sure to have come to the front sooner or later on active service, as it was he led a desultory but tolerably blameless life, with a secret zest and satisfaction which he was at infinite pains to conceal. A man popular with women, and who mixed freely in their society, but at the same time was singularly impervious to their attractions, one of those men who, though not given to flirtation or philandering, fall in love when their time comes without being aware of it, and are at once carried away captive at the will of the conqueror. He had once sententiously enunciated his views of matrimony at the club he was affiliated

to, and had described it as "Like taking the long odds on a big race, only there's no possibility of hedging—you must stand it out." He was an old friend of Curtice's, his senior by four or five years, and perhaps more intimate with him than anybody else. Curtice, indeed, held a higher opinion of Jim Lyster than anyone else. He always declared that Lyster was one of the cleverest men he knew, and that if circumstances only compelled him to exert himself his numerous circle of friends would discover it also. Lyster himself always placed a most modest estimate upon his abilities. He would sum up his capabilities somehow in this wise, "I am not a fool, you know, and I can ride a bit, shoot a bit, and make up a fourth at whist if wanted, but then most fellows can do all that. Clever, bless you?—me. Nobody ever suspected such a thing of me except the young cousin I had in the —th Hussars who came to me to help him out of his difficulties, and he changed his mind when I told him the case was a little beyond me. My Aunt Madderson, it is true, thought it of me till her parrot died under my treatment, since then I've every reason to believe she entertains the lowest opinion of me, which will be openly expressed when her last will and testament comes to be read."

However, for all this, Henry Curtice adhered firmly to his opinion of Jim Lyster, he had more confidence about his judgment, as regarded an

awkward point, than that of most people. Of course, I am not speaking of a legal point, that would be a matter for the lights of his own profession to decide upon, but as he strode on to Kensington Gardens he could not help feeling just a little put out at the assured way in which his friend had spoken of Robby Gauntlett being the heir to Saxham Grange. Certainly he did not appear to be acquainted with the true state of the case. He apparently thought that it was a question whether the estate was not entailed. Although Curtice had always believed that not to be the case, yet he only knew what his mother had told him some few years ago. It was possible that his uncle had entailed Saxham since then. Anyway, it was evident, whatever Lyster might have said afterwards to soothe his feelings, that he regarded Robby Gauntlett as his uncle's heir, and in all probability the world in general did likewise.

Henry prided himself upon being a matter-of-fact person, and it was rather a disappointment to find that in the eyes of an unprejudiced spectator he was a mere dreamer of dreams, when he had visions of inheriting Saxham Grange.

CHAPTER VI.

SAXHAM GETS EXCITED.

HENRY CURTICE sat down to dinner that night in a very discontented frame of mind, and, as is so often

one's luck under those circumstances, ran across no acquaintance to join him at the caravansari he frequented. He was dissatisfied with himself, and when that is the case to dine by oneself is to have got into very bad company. He drank rather more wine than usual, but it seemed to do him no good. The fact was that he was much disgusted to find that he had built upon his chance of succeeding to Saxham more than he'd had any idea of.

If there was one thing upon which Curtice prided himself it was his common-sense. Imagination, castle-building, etc., were all unprofitable dreams that had nothing to do with the business of life; the law more especially they had nothing to do with. Lyster had torn the veil away that afternoon when, in his ignorance of the real facts of the case, he had so utterly ignored Curtice's chance of ever succeeding to the broad lands of Saxham. He felt ashamed of himself, that a clear-headed, sensible man such as he piqued himself upon being, should ever have taken such an outside contingency into his calculations, and he was conscious now that he had unwittingly reckoned on it more than he had any right to do. Had Lyster only been dining with him, and had he made frank confession he would have been comforted; for a favourite axiom of that worldly-wise Mentor was, "Zero don't do to count upon, but it's always a pull to have included in your game."

Still, Curtice did not see why that should make any difference in his matrimonial project; he continued to turn this over in his mind in that eminently matter-of-fact way upon which he so prided himself. All thought of Saxham he put resolutely on one side; it was good for a young man in his profession to marry, but his cousins were well dowered, and either of them would make him a suitable wife. He had, it is true, not even yet determined as to which it should be. He was not given to make up his mind precipitately, but for all that he *could* make up his mind—a feat not given to all of us—and in accordance with these reflections he determined to run down to the Grange the next day, and in the course of a short visit decide which of the sisters he preferred, and then he would open the trenches forthwith. Rather an inflated mood this in which to go a-wooing. A very shrewd observer has laid it down that, in his opinion, the most artful wooers are those who affect excessive timidity; he declares that in the tenderness of their hearts women can't help pitying a creature who appears to be so desperately afraid of them. That in their anxiety to tranquillize him and put him at his ease, they pity and make much of him, and that he attains an intimate footing with them much quicker than his more audacious brother. The mild curate he regarded as the subtlest of mankind in this particular. However,

Henry Curtice was little likely to prosecute his love suit in this fashion, for under a quiet manner he had plenty of audacity, and with all reasonable respect for the sex, stood not the least in awe of them.

He was cordially welcomed at the Grange ; if not so popular as Rob Gauntlett, he still always made himself pleasant, and was usually willing to join in anything that was going on, and Rose rather libelled him, when she declared one hardly knew if he were in the house or not. He was certainly a good deal quieter than the more effusive Rob, who was expected down the following week.

“Glad to see you, Henry,” exclaimed the Squire, as he entered the drawing-room just before dinner. “Always glad to see you. I suppose the day will come shortly, when we shall be told that Buggins *versus* Buggins absorbs all your time and attention, and have to content ourselves with the eloquent Counsel’s speech of two columns’ length in the daily papers.”

“I hope so,” returned Henry, laughing ; “but, as yet, the eloquent Counsel is not quite in such request as he could wish. Never mind, as they say in melodrama, ‘The time will come,’ ——”

“Heaven help us !” interposed Miss Rose, demurely.

Curtice made a mock gesture of menace at the delinquent as he said :

“I hear, uncle, that you have taken to racing,

and that you are going to run a horse for the Cæsarewitch."

"Ah! It's a freak of Robby Gauntlett's," rejoined the Squire. "He's bought a colt of my breeding, and, for fun, has entered it in the great Autumn Handicap in my name, but I know nothing about it, nor for the matter of that, I fancy, does he."

"But you must recollect, Henry," said Rose, "we are all intensely interested, and that the proper salutation in this house, when you come down to breakfast is, 'What price Bobadil this morning?'"

"Well," said Curtice, "you can't complain of that, as far as I've seen it's liberal in the extreme, and looks as if the bookmakers were not much afraid of his success."

"And I tell you," replied the girl with mock gravity, "that his success is certain. Now remember you've been told, don't say afterwards that we had a good thing at Saxham, and kept it all to ourselves."

"I should think he'll say," said the Squire, "that he's got the horsiest cousin in the kingdom, but here's dinner. Take your aunt, Henry, there's only ourselves to-day."

During the meal Henry was informed by Jenny Wrexford that the next piece of excitement in their neighbourhood was the Croftstone Ball. There was a faint interposition of "Next to Bobadil," from Rose, but it was evidently a mock protest, that

young lady's thoughts, like her sister's, being centred in the Croftstone festival ; that all the neighbours were filling their houses for it ; that of course they were obliged to do as their neighbours did ; that everyone meant it should be the best Croftstone Ball ever known ; that they meant to be full to the roof tree ; that nearly every room in the house was engaged already ; that Robby Gauntlett was coming ; that of course *he*, Henry, was ; and did he know a nice dancing man or two, he could bring with him ?

"Of course he does," chimed in Rosie. "A dweller in Babylon must know hundreds of nice young men. Tell them there are partridges to be killed ; that the Maids of Kent are fair to look upon ; that 'they're lovely, they're divine,' as Mr. Swiveller sings. Tell them that there will be such a show of beauty at the Croftstone Ball that they will never forgive themselves if they miss seeing it. Tell them we are very nice people, in short, Henry Curtice, deliver two dancing men into our hands, under the penalty of our sore displeasure."

"Never mind her rhodomontade," exclaimed his aunt, "but we do want another man or two for our party. The young men in the neighbourhood are not very numerous, and have been pretty well culled by this."

"All right," replied Curtice, "I'll do my best ; but, remember, men have hardly got back from the holidays, and that really you're more likely to catch

them in the country than in London just now." And with that the subject dropped.

When he came down to breakfast next morning he was gravely informed by Miss Rosie that the bulletin was unsatisfactory. "That though the favourite had passed a good night and was exceedingly firm at the Musical Tattersall's, there was no mention of Bobadil, though," continued the young lady, "what being exceedingly firm at the Musical Tattersall's means, I haven't the slightest idea."

"Nor I," said Curtice. "Do you know what it means, uncle?"

"Yes," replied the Squire, "there's a good deal of betting goes on in the evening at the Oxford Music Hall, it refers to that."

"But it doesn't refer to Bobadil," said the girl, "and as to the favourite, I can only hope 'being very firm,' is good for him."

"It don't look," said the Squire musingly, "as if Bobadil was being backed to any extent, or by anybody who knew much about him. Given a horse lightly weighted in a big handicap, and no matter how bad he is, there's always a certain number of people who will take the long shots about him. Heaven knows what they expect, but I believe they fancy that horses are kept for particular races, from the day they are foaled."

After breakfast Curtice strolled out into the park to smoke his cigar, and found himself at length at

the lodge. The under-keeper who lived there with his wife and family, happened to be standing at the door.

"Good morning, Wilkinson," he exclaimed, as the man touched his hat. "Wife and children all well?"

"Glad to see you down again, Mr. Henry," replied the keeper. "The missus and young 'uns are nicely, sir, thanks. You'll be for having a turn at the birds of course, though you're not such a one for shooting as Mr. Rob," and the man slightly shook his head as if in pity for one not possessed of that keen zest to kill, which next to being an accomplished professor thereof, is in a keeper's eyes the highest attribute of humanity. "Well," he continued, "we've a very tidy sprinkling of 'em, and if we've luck there's a good bag or two to be made I'll go bail. You see, sir, we haven't had anybody down much to cut into them, but I hear Mister Rob's coming shortly. He's very straight on 'em, is Mister Rob."

"Yes," replied Curtice, smiling, "I can't shoot like my cousin, but I shall thoroughly enjoy a day or two with you before I go back. We've had some rare good days together haven't we, in old times?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the keeper with a laugh. "Do you mind that day at Barrow Hill when we got the forty-three brace? My word, Mister Rob let nothing go that afternoon, and you never shot better in your life, sir."

"No, that's a day to look back upon. You must

try and give me another like it. It will recall old times."

"Old times," said the keeper with a jolly laugh as he slipped the *douceur* Curtice had given him into his pocket. "They say we're going to have old times indeed in the village; the place is full of it. They say the Squire's entered a horse for a big race again, after all these years. I was only a boy at the time, but I mind the last time he won some great race. They set the church bells ringing, and there was beer for everyone who chose to ask for it at the 'Marquis of Granby,' to drink the Squire's health. Everybody won money over it I heard, and as for Mr. Crowder, I believe he won quite a heap. D'ye think we shall have the bells ringing this Autumn, sir?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Wilkinson, I'm no judge of such things."

"Well, Mr. Crowder says we shall, and he knows a lot about horse-racing, does Mr. Crowder. There's a deal of talk about it in the village. I shouldn't mind going a crown on it myself if the Squire says it's all right."

"Well, he hasn't told me anything," replied Curtice, "and by what he says I don't think he knows much about it at present. I should think John Crowder, and the village generally, will most likely be very sorry for themselves before Christmas;" and with a nod to Wilkinson he turned and strolled back to the Grange.

Henry Curtice knew, and was well known to everybody about Saxham. Both nephews from their earliest years had always had the free run of their uncle's house, and had passed a considerable portion of their time there, but this had been more especially the case with Henry. He was a delicate boy, and, from his father's vocation, his home was of necessity in London. His mother was only too glad that he should spend as much of his time as possible in the pure country air of Saxham, rather than in the less healthy atmosphere of the Metropolis; with his slight tendency to delicacy in the chest, Mrs. Curtice considered that anything was better for the boy than the gruesome fogs of the latter. Rob Gauntlett's home was in the country, but blessed with a healthy constitution and exuberant spirits, that young gentleman flourished, and distinguished himself by "creating a good deal of racket and rout," wherever he might be; and in this way it had come to pass that Henry had always been more at the Grange than his cousin. As he walked homewards, he could not in the first instance help feeling amused at the idea of a little country village being quite in a turmoil because a horse that had been bred amongst them was entered for a big race. He questioned whether Bobadil's name was even calling forth remarks in racing circles, but, as he said to himself—"It doesn't take much to make a stir in a country

village." Then he came back to that far more important subject, viz :—Which of his cousins he liked best? He was on the purest cousinly terms with them so far, but recognised at once, that if he was to progress in the good graces of one, he must naturally decline in favour with the other. As soon as his attentions became marked, he would certainly be looked upon as the exclusive property of the cousin that he had selected.

Had he been of a more volatile turn of mind he might have settled the question by the tossing of a shilling, but that would never occur to Henry Curtice. After what his friend Lyster would have described as "a good solid think," he came to the conclusion that his cousin Jenny would suit him best. She was more staid in character he thought than her sister, and though it was doing a bright and lively girl scant justice to take such a view of her character, she certainly was quieter in manner, than the more sprightly Rose.

"And that's settled, thank goodness," murmured Curtice in the quiet assured way of a man who has at length got a knotted problem satisfactorily disposed of, "and now, before I go in, just let me think who I can bring down to this ball, I must catch a couple of men if I can. When young women mean ball-going, and give one such orders as I got last night, they don't brook disappointment. It will never do at the commencement of my suit to fail in

producing the first two witnesses for the appellant," and Curtice chuckled at his professional joke. "By Jove! if I had only known yesterday afternoon—Lyster was the very man I want. I don't know that he dances; I've no doubt he does, he does everything. I don't know whether he could come, but if he couldn't, he would grasp the situation at once, and lay hands upon those who would. Jim Lyster's the one man I know who would drive half over London to serve a friend. It isn't that I don't know plenty of men myself who would have done, but then, hang it, they're none of them back yet. Jim will have to stand by me in this dilemma, or else I shall probably fail to secure the victims. If he would only come himself, I should like to show him my intended, and hear what he thinks of her. I'll write to him by to-day's post."

In accordance with this resolve, Curtice wrote that very afternoon. He told Lyster the quandary he was in, and adjured him by all the ties of friendship to assist him in this matter—"Come yourself if you possibly can, and bring anyone you like. Next week I know there's racing at Newmarket, but it's the week after that I want you, surely there's nothing of that sort going on then, at all events, Rob Gauntlett is to be here, and if there was any racing of importance it's not likely he would miss it. Let me count upon you this time, I've strong reasons for it which I will explain

when we meet. Write by return and say you've booked it."

"By the way, you were asking me yesterday whether I knew anything about Bobadil? Although entered in my uncle's name, it seems he belongs to Rob, who entered him because our uncle bred him. The Squire says he knows nothing about him, nor can it be supposed that they're really any wiser in the village, but it's a horsey little place, and they're all firmly convinced that Bobadil will win the Cæsarewitch."

CHAPTER VII.

"ROSIE MAKES A DISCOVERY."

LYSTER was still lingering in London, endeavouring to pick up that second hunter he required before betaking himself to his hunting quarters in the Midlands. London is very pleasant in October, and Jim moreover was very difficult to please in that matter of a horse, it's the same with all of us, whether it's a horse or a house, a watch or what you will. Having found the very thing that hits our fancy, only to discover that it is beyond our means, we're sure to take a jaundiced and disparaging view of any lower-priced substitute, and this was just Lyster's case. He was shown several horses which would have suited him fairly well, but then they were not *the* horse; moreover, he knew that the

animal which had so taken his fancy was still for sale. It was all very well for prudence to say warningly he couldn't afford it, but on the other hand the tempter in the guise of Taylor, whom he was always coming across, kept suggesting "that it was a pity to let a good horse slip." Jim, indeed, was as much puzzled whether to buy or not to buy as Henry Curtice had been about which cousin it would be best to marry.

Lazily looking over his letters as he sat at breakfast at his club, Jim came in due course to his friend's. "Humph," he muttered, "a walk or two in the turnips would do me a deal of good. Old Wrexford too is a rare good sort, and would be sure to do one decently. I don't mind a ball, it don't bore one much if one's plenty of pleasant people to talk to, and they don't try you too high in the dancing line, besides Henry Curtice seems to want me badly; I wonder what's the matter, he's not the fellow to get into a scrape, propose to two young women in the same week or anything of that sort. Hallo! What's all this? Bobadil belongs to Rob Gauntlett! The deuce he does! I wonder when he bought him; this makes a very different thing of it. Rob may not be very clever at racing, but Isaac Martin is as cunning as an old dog-fox. It may be some dodge of his. Taylor told me they were mad about the colt down at Saxham. Here, waiter, bring me a morning paper. Ah, here we

are, 'Betting at Tattersall's — 50 to 1 Bobadil, taken.' Well, someone is dribbling money on him, anyhow. He's not shown himself much of a horse so far, but these three-year-olds sometimes improve wonderfully at the back end. A fellow might do worse than come across Gauntlett just now. I daresay he'd give me a hint, and, by Jove, if he does I'll follow Taylor's advice, and if it comes off I'll have that horse. I'll write to Curtice at once and tell him 'I'm on.' Now to pick up a fellow to take with me. Don't suppose I shall have much trouble about that. Couple of days' shooting, a ball, pleasant house and contingencies, sounds good enough for most of us."

There was a little flutter of excitement at the Grange, when Curtice triumphantly produced Lyster's reply.

"There, Jenny," he said as he handed her the letter, "Jim's coming himself, and I'm sure you'll all like him, he's always popular; people laugh at his affectations sometimes at first, but they always end in liking him. You see he says he'll bring somebody with him."

"And I've no doubt," said Miss Wrexford, "that we can trust him to bring somebody nice. I'm so glad he's coming himself, we've heard you talk so much of him that I'm awfully curious to see him."

"I'm sure I shall feel quite afraid of him," said

Rose. "From what you've told us he's so dreadfully cool, isn't he?"

"If you mean cool in the sense of impertinent, certainly not; but if you mean unruffled—he is. It's pretty nearly impossible to put Jim out, but don't run away with the idea that the coolness for which he is so notorious consists in doing exactly what he likes without the slightest regard for other people. Had he been that sort he would never have been such a great friend of mine. It's merely his utter imperturbability at any discomfort or disaster. Where you girls would rage and threaten hysterics, where some of us would vainly struggle to suppress bad language, Jim would sum the whole thing up as rather a bore."

"What an exasperating person!" exclaimed Jenny.

"I suppose no insult would move him," said Rosie.

"If you were a man I shouldn't advise you to try," rejoined Curtice drily. "I saw him riled once."

"Well, what happened?" exclaimed both the girls, and even Mrs. Wrexford looked up with interest.

"It served the fellow perfectly right, and he richly deserved what he got," was the reply dreamily given, as if the speaker had the whole scene before his eye that minute. "He's not forgotten it to this day, I'll engage."

"What took place? Tell us, Henry," said Rose.

"Oh, never mind," he replied, "I should not have said so much; these things are best forgotten."

There was a row, and it wasn't Jim Lyster got the worst of it. I shouldn't have said anything about it, only you seem to think that because a man's slow to anger he is necessarily a coward; uncle here will tell you that slow beginners often stay best."

"Quite right," replied the Squire, "although you are mixing up temper and galloping in a way that's hardly fair. We must only hope that Rob will discover something of that sort in Bobadil; so far he has proved himself not only a slow beginner but equally slow to finish, which latter, though an admirable quality in either a soldier or prize-fighter, is very much the reverse in a race-horse."

Although Henry Curtice was not a keen sportsman, yet it was a matter of general remark how very lazy he was about following the partridges during this visit. In vain did Wilkinson appear at the Grange every morning to know at what time Mr. Henry would be ready to start; it was only to be told that Mr. Henry was not going out that day. In vain did the Squire rally him and tell him that as he would have no time for such frivolities later on, it was all the more reason that he should make the most of the present. "The birds have been hardly touched, this season," he urged, "and will be all the better for thinning. I never did care much for shooting myself, and have grown so idle about it now-a-days, that I hardly ever handle a gun." No, Curtice declared

he'd letters to write in the mornings, and seemed quite contented to dangle about after his cousins in the afternoons.

"Wait, uncle," he said, "till the ball week, when Robby and Jim Lyster are here, we'll give your birds a real good dusting then. You want to be out in strength to lay hold of partridges in October."

"Ah, Robby wouldn't wait for strength to be amongst them, if he were here," replied the Squire, and as he spoke Henry felt that it behoved him more than ever to put the contingency of Saxham ever being his out of his mind.

Now though Henry had always been good-naturedly at his cousins' call when they wanted him, yet the way in which he clung to their skirts at present very soon attracted their attention. They talked it over and jested about it between themselves, but at first were far from suspecting his real motive. Jenny indeed suggested that he was in the toils, and had fallen a victim to some fair enslaver who was treating him harshly. A sufferer from unrequited love usually excites the sympathy of women. In their compassion they would fain bind up his wounds and restore him to a sound frame of mind, and though one likes to believe that this is all the outcome of pure compassion on their part it has been cynically hinted that they are well aware of man's weakness when his love has been

rejected, and that soothing his affliction is apt to lead to a transfer of his affections.

Jenny Wrexford, however, was uninfluenced by any such thought as this, but having made up her mind that he was suffering from a love disappointment, she was unusually kind and considerate towards him, all of which Henry put down to her reciprocating his advances, and felt comfortably assured that his suit was going on most favourably. A man not quite so confident of success and with more knowledge of women would have felt a little uneasy at the girl's manner being so extremely frank and sisterly, but this never occurred to Henry. It would not do to speak, he thought, just yet, but that there was a tacit understanding between them he felt comfortably assured. As for Jenny such an idea had not even entered her head. She thought he was a long time in confessing his love trouble to her, but then he'd always been a reticent man, still that she should be made a confidante of that trouble before he left she felt no doubt. It was reserved for her youngest sister to discover the real state of the case. Lookers on we are told see most of the game, and that young lady was not only quick-witted and observant, but had experiences of her own to guide her.

"We have made a little mistake," said Miss Rosie to herself, with a shake of her pretty head, the last morning of Curtice's visit, as she tripped into the

garden and saw her sister and that gentleman strolling slowly up and down the terrace on the south side of the house. "Instead of suffering from unrequited love, it strikes me, my dear cousin, that you're afflicted with a budding affection. Far from the fever having burnt itself out, it is only in its early stage at present. But the question is—With which of us has he fallen in love? In justice to myself," she continued with a merry laugh, "I must put that question, though with the deepest humiliation I am constrained to own that I believe it to be Jin and not me. It's a terrible reflection on my personal charms," she continued, her eyes dancing with laughter, "to be eclipsed on the threshold of life by my elder sister. It may be it's admiration of my lovely self that he's whispering into Jin's ear this minute, only I know it isn't. I don't believe she cares a bit about him in that way. Still, when a young man walks me about, I'd rather it was left for me to decide when I'd had enough of him, so I'll not interrupt them. If I could give you one bit of advice, Henry, it would be not to hurry matters; I don't much think she'll ever have you. But I'm sure your chance is a poor one at present."

However, as we know, Henry Curtice had no intention of putting his fate to the test upon this occasion. He departed, much to Jenny's surprise, with his love story untold, though she would have

been still more surprised if she had had to listen to it. Wilkinson's comment, although applied to the shooting of partridges, would have been equally appropriate to the young barrister's wooing. "He ain't half keen," and this I suppose must have misled Jenny Wrexford about a thing in which a woman is rarely mistaken.

The betting on the Cæsarewitch and Cambridge-shire that autumn waxed very heavy; not only were the favourites for both races numerous and heavily backed, but there was a perfect crowd of outsiders continually introduced into the market, varying from the extreme prices of a thousand to fifteen down to twenty to one. They came and went, these ephemeral fancies of the public, now and again, it's true when supported by the stable settling down into steady favouritism, and thereby luring sanguine backers to once more tempt their fate by taking care to be "on early." Among these ever and anon appeared the name of Bobadil. That he was backed a little fitfully was evident, or he would not have been quoted. It was a rare time for the book-makers, to say nothing of the opportunities they had of getting round by laying against genuine candidates, the British public had never been so ready with its strange fancies and loose sovereigns. No man in all the kingdom was keener to bet against these outsiders, many of which would never see the post, than Mr. Barnes. He grew facetious about

collecting those loose sovereigns of the public. He was playing for the biggest stake this time he had ever done in his life. He had recently acquired some interest in a small racing stable, the supporters of which were principally amongst his own fraternity, and in that stable was a colt in which Mr. Barnes had a share, and which was not only a good deal better than he was given credit for but had been for the whole year "readied," that is, persistently run to lose with a view to its getting at a light weight into this very Cæsarewitch. It figured already in the market quotations and was quietly but steadily backed by the commissioner of the little clique connected with the stable in which it was trained. The professionals who owned it were of course making their books for Plutarch, and though continually stealing a little money on him, had settled that their main investments should not be made till the eleventh hour. Should their plans be successful there would not only be a very large stake to divide amongst them, but it would further be a very profitable race to them as bookmakers.

Mr. Barnes had laid against Bobadil some few times in the ordinary course of business but had as yet no idea that the horse was in Martin's stable and was Gauntlett's property. He looked upon him as still in Powell's hands, and one of those many foolish fancies of the British public. He knew that he'd always run a bad colt, and absorbed in the

heavy *coup* that he and his confederates were playing for, had so far troubled his head no more about him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"DICK THE RAVEN."

THERE are very few of us but what have some bitterness in our cup. No man can expect not to find a thorn among the rose leaves. Lucky indeed if he does not find that life contains many more thorns than rose leaves, as, alas, is the case with too many of us. John Crowder was well-to-do, and a man not only of importance in his own eyes, but, what was more to the purpose, in the eyes of the community. The parson and the doctor, by virtue of their position, were leading men, but it may be doubted whether either of them ranked quite as high as the landlord of the "Marquis of Granby." with the good people of Saxham. Still John Crowder had his thorn, although it was one that had only grown of late years. The London road ran through the village, and on the crest of the hill leading into Saxham stood an old-fashioned public house with a small tea-garden at the back. The poor little place did an equally poor little business; its proprietor treated "*Mister Crowder*" with the greatest respect, and that worthy always spoke of the "Spotted Dog" in most patronising tones when

he condescended to remember its existence; he would describe it as "a tidy little beer house well conducted by a most respectable man, but where he believed you could get a very decent glass of ale."

But the old order changes. The proprietor—you wouldn't have caught John Crowder calling him the landlord—died, and he was succeeded by a new man, more imbued with the spirit of the times and of a very go-ahead disposition. He spent money on the house, considerably enlarged and improved the tea-garden at the back, changed its name to the "Wrexford Arms," put up notices that "teas were provided at the shortest notice, picnic parties punctually attended to," all sorts of framed notices with regard to Bass's Beer and Allsopp's Pale Ales, etc., and finally, to the bewilderment of John Crowder, not only succeeded in catching a considerable portion of the travelling traffic but even seduced from their allegiance some of the "Marquis of Granby's" old customers. Not, certainly, that more privileged class whom the autocratic landlord admitted to the parlour, but that lower order that steadily consumed malt liquor in the tap-room with much relish and satisfaction. It was some time before John Crowder could be brought to realise that he was menaced by a serious opposition. He'd never regarded the place on the top of the hill as anything but a roadside alehouse, and that it could possibly threaten to rival the "Marquis of Granby"

was a thing to him almost incredible, nor was he the man to meet his opponent with his own weapons. If picnic parties came to his house, well there was the coffee-room for them, or he would even go the length of allowing them to use a private room if there should happen to be one vacant, but this offered little attraction to people who had come to enjoy a long day in the country, who wanted to eat their food in the fresh air, and under the glorious summer skies.

The proprietor of the “Wrexford Arms” gave them all this. There was a glorious view from his garden, every convenience for supplementing such provisions as they had brought with them, and civil attendance, and it was not long before the new inn began to attain quite a reputation in the neighbourhood and to do not unprofitable business of this kind in the summer season. In the same manner at this time of year the frequenters of John Crowder’s hostelry found that it was pleasanter to drink their ale out of doors instead of in the hot and stuffy tap-room of the “Marquis of Granby.” Habit is everything, and when the days drew in and the weather drove them inside, these renegades found they were quite as well cared for in the house at the top of the hill as that at the bottom.

Although not able to boast such a view from it, John Crowder possessed a beautiful old-fashioned garden, even larger than his rival’s, but this he

strictly reserved for his own family and their friends, and although the question had often been asked him by picnic parties whether there was no garden in which they could eat their dinners, he had always steadily refused to let them go into his. It had never been thrown open to the public in his father's time, and he wasn't going to begin it. When his son succeeded him in the business he could do as he liked. If he didn't mind the garden littered about with paper and so on, well and good, he, John Crowder, did, and wasn't going to have it, all of which, though more pleasant perhaps for him and his family, was not conducive to the comfort of the public. A good-hearted, if somewhat autocratic, irascible man in the main, but bearing no charitable nor kindly feeling towards Joe Field, his rival at the top of the hill.

One afternoon, towards the end of September, John Crowder's interest was aroused by the arrival of a traveller whom he could not make out, and who required a bed for the night. Visitors of this description were not numerous at the "Marquis of Granby." There was a parlour called the commercial-room, but it was little frequented in these days, though a sprinkling of "travellers" still occasionally used the house. Hop factors too at certain times of the year often made it their headquarters for two or three nights. Still most of these were personally known to John Crowder and, to use his own

expression when he did not know them, he knew the cut of their jibs anyway, but upon this occasion he couldn't make the stranger out, and even demeaned himself so far as to ask William, the waiter, what he thought of him. William opined he was a "commercial gent," an intimation which called from his master a rejoinder "that he was an old fool." And then Mr. Crowder promptly came to the conclusion that the best way to satisfy his curiosity was to enter into conversation with his guest without more ado.

"A very pleasant and affable gentleman," was the landlord's sum-up of the stranger, after a short interview with him, during which the latter had ordered a snug little dinner and insisted upon his host having a glass of wine with him, further requesting he would join him in his repast. He said he was travelling chiefly on pleasure, that a little business had brought him to Saxham. He wanted to see the church, he'd heard a good deal about it, and there were one or two points about it he was anxious to verify. A well-known place, Saxham; everybody had heard of it. "Was it not here that the famous stud-farm of Mr. Wrexford was located? Was it possible, did his host think, for him to get a peep at the paddocks? Not that he knew much about horse-racing himself, but he always enjoyed it when his business allowed him to snatch a day. He thought there was no more exciting sight than a close finish for a big race."

"Right you are," replied John Crowder. "It's the finest sight under heaven, and the Squire, he's bred some real flyers, I tell you. As for going round the Paddocks, it ain't likely they'll let everybody who comes along do that—why, bless you, if they did, I suppose it 'ud be like one of those pilgrimages to Mecca I've read of. Maybe you've a line to the Squire, in which case, perhaps, they'll let you go round, but of course they're not going to have strangers poking their noses into 'em. Mind I don't say," continued John Crowder, lowering his voice and speaking in mysterious tones, "I mightn't manage it. The stud groom's an old friend of mine, and if you are a-going to be here a day or two I'll see what I can do."

"It's very kind of you," replied the stranger; "it would be a real treat, and if I'm not summoned back to Town, I'll stay, don't you make any mistake about that," and the stranger exchanged a sympathetic wink with his host and insisted upon their cementing the engagement with another glass of that "Best old nutty brown," which had been opened especially in his honour.

John Crowder dined with "the affable gentleman" that evening, and the latter won golden opinions from his host by the simple process of listening with apparently greedy ears to the long dissertation upon horse breeding and horse racing, with which John Crowder favoured him. So fast

indeed, had he progressed in the landlord's good graces, that dinner being ended, he exclaimed :

"Well, sir, I'm obliged to leave you for it's our club night ; we've a sort of club assemblies here twice a week, and I'm bound to be in the chair if I can manage it ; perhaps you'll do us the honour of joining us. I'm sure they'd all be proud if you would ; they are all the right sort, never fear, you'll hear lots of sporting talk, unless they've quite unexpectedly changed their note."

The stranger willingly assented, and accompanied his host to the parlour opposite the coffee-room, where Mr. Crowder and his friends were wont to assemble and discuss the affairs of the neighbourhood generally, and horse-racing in particular. The company consisted of a few neighbouring farmers, some half-dozen of the principal tradesmen in the village, and some others whose status it would be difficult accurately to define. The doctor would occasionally look in, but was not there to-night. The landlord introduced the stranger as a gentleman from London, and confidentially informed his particular friends that the gentleman had a very pretty fancy for the Turf. "He don't know much, you understand," whispered John Crowder oracularly, "but then Londoners never do. It can't be expected, you know ; they're not like us who've had the privilege of being brought up amongst horses."

"Ah, that opens a man's mind, it do," observed a

gentleman whose lower extremities were cased in breeches and butcher boots.

"Yes, sir, it does," said John Crowder as he took the chair, placing the stranger on his right hand, "and now gentlemen, give your orders, and then we'll all start fair for a sociable evening."

The stranger made himself excessively pleasant, chatting easily with anybody who addressed him, and when the conversation took a sporting turn, joined in it very diffidently but with manifest interest. It was not long before Bobadil and the forthcoming Cæsarewitch was touched upon, and the stranger was evidently much struck by the extreme confidence the company all seemed to have in the colt coming out of that race triumphant. He ventured to express his surprise to the gentleman in butcher boots at their all being so extremely sanguine about a matter which he had always understood was so uncertain as horse racing.

"Ah," returned that worthy, who having unsuccessfully essayed to make a living as a veterinary surgeon, had now betaken himself to horse dealing, "we know what Bobadil can do, don't we, Crowder?"

The landlord replied with a nod of his head, a wink, and then remarked, "Hope you're well on, Gasford."

The ex-vet. reciprocated the wink, and replied, "that he stood to win a tidy little pile."

"I suppose," observed the stranger, "this Bobadil is a colt that's already distinguished himself?"

"Well, he ain't yet, so to speak," replied John Crowder, "but we never turn out bad 'uns from here."

Considering the confidence expressed by the company in this horse's immediate success at the coming Newmarket meeting, the stranger hardly regarded this as a satisfactory reply. For a moment or two he was silent, and then suddenly exclaimed :

"Ah, I see, you're going, of course, by what the Squire tells you about it."

"Well," said John Crowder, "I ain't just at liberty to mention his opinion, but you take my advice, and back it."

John Crowder, to put it mildly, was speaking vaguely, after the manner in which men are given to impart racing information to their fellows. He had never exchanged a word with the Squire upon the subject, nor, as we know, could the latter have told him anything of Bobadil's chance even if he had.

The stranger continued to converse freely, but took the earliest opportunity of wishing his host and his companions, good-night; pleading fatigue, and reminding John Crowder of his promise to take him round the Paddocks, if possible, he retired.

"Ah!" said Mr. Shelton to himself, "it was just worth coming down to see about. If the people generally, who're nibbling at Bobadil, know no more about him than the pack of fools here, they are simply throwing their money away. As for that pompous old landlord, whom they seem to regard as

John Day and the Admiral rolled into one, green geese are nothing to him. I daresay he thinks I expect to find Bobadil in the Paddocks. Want to see the Paddocks indeed, about as much as I want to see the church. What I want to find out is, 'Who are backing Bobadil, and on what grounds they're doing it.' I have found out that Gauntlett bought the colt, and that he is in Martin's hands. I wonder, by the way, if Barnes knows that; he's got a game on of his own this time, and is close as wax about it. Well, if I can only find out that Bobadil's backed in the right quarters, I'll have a little game of my own too. Master Horace don't mean to let me stand in with him over the Cæsarewitch, that's certain. Very good, I can play my hand alone, and we'll see which has the best of it." Shelton and Barnes had so often been confederates that the former was not a little put out upon this occasion; he felt quite sure that Barnes had embarked in some deeply planned *coup* for the coming big handicap, and was much incensed that his old chum had insisted in keeping his scheme to himself.

Shelton was up betimes the next morning, and strolled out of the house with a view to getting a little fresh air before breakfast; he walked down to the post-office, asked if there were any letters for Mr. Tomlinson, and appeared not in the least surprised at being told there were none. He chatted with the post mistress some few minutes about the

place and neighbourhood generally. In particular did he seem curious about the family at the Grange; inquired whether the Squire had any sons; whether he usually lived there, and whether his nephew, Mr. Gauntlett, was much down in these parts. He then strolled back to the "Marquis of Granby," and turned into the stable-yard where a man was lazily engaged in washing a gig.

"A fine morning," remarked Mr. Shelton. "Are you the ostler?"

"They do call me that at times," rejoined the man, somewhat surlily.

"And something else, too, I suppose. What's your name?"

"They call me Dick," replied the ostler.

"Not communicative," muttered Mr. Shelton.

"Yes, but Dick what?" he continued.

"I dunno; I never remembers being called anything else but Dick."

"But hang it, man, you must have some other name, surely. Here's a shilling to wet your whistle, and sharpen your memory."

The man's eyes sparkled as he took the shilling, and replied, with a pull at his forelock, "Thank 'ee kindly, sir. You see I'm parish-bred, and the likes of me has no want of many names. They call me the Raven at times."

"And what the devil makes them call you that?"

said Shelton, not a little astonished at the lugubrious cognomen.

“Well, sir, it’s all like this. They say I’m a croaker. I s’pose I don’t take a cheerful view of life. It can’t be expected; I ain’t had much to be cheerful about. Then you see they’re always betting on horse-racing; we ain’t got much else to amuse us down here, and I noticed whatever they said would win generally didn’t. And so it all began in that way, you see.”

“No, I don’t,” said Shelton; “I still don’t understand.”

“Well, when they told me a horse would win I told ’em it wouldn’t. ‘What’ll you bet,’ says they. ‘He don’t win,’ says I; ‘he don’t win for a quart of yale,’ says I, and so I got a-betting on horse-racing like the rest on ’em. Well, I stuck to my own opinion and always bet against the favourite, and won a bit of money, too, at it. Then a young chap here who’s in Mr. Green’s shop, he lost a crown to me, and declared I was a regular Raven, and that I’d a regular scent for ‘dead ’uns’; and the name’s stuck to me ever since. I dunno what he meant; all I did was always to bet against the favourite.”

“Why, damme, he’s one of us,” exclaimed Shelton. “A regular bookmaker, by Jove! I suppose you don’t think them very clever down here about horse-racing?”

Dick cast a quick glance up and down the yard,

and then said: "Clever! They make it a rule always to back a horse that was bred at the Grange, not because they know it to be a good horse, but simply because he was foaled here. Clever! If I'd only a little more money I'd win all the 'brass' in Saxham before the year was out."

Shelton was getting quite interested in the conversation. "And what would you do if you had a hundred pounds?" he asked.

"What would I do for a hundred pounds?" said the man, and his eyes actually glittered at the bare thought. "Anything. I'd be a rich man then, and I love money."

"You misunderstood me, my good fellow," said Shelton. "I didn't ask what you would do *for* a hundred pounds, I asked what you would do if you *had* a hundred pounds."

"Do?" replied Dick. "I'd go racing like the book-makers do, and fill my pockets with money as they do. Who ever heard of a bookmaker being broke?"

"They are at times, though," rejoined Shelton. "However, I've no doubt you'd do very well in the ring, Dick. Your master's a clever man, eh?"

"Maister's maister," replied Dick, sententiously.

"Quite so," rejoined Shelton. "Good-bye, Dick. Wish you luck," and nodding carelessly, he strolled out of the yard.

"That fellow would do well at the trade," he muttered to himself as he turned into the inn.

“And he won’t be very scrupulous about how he gets a start if ever he has the chance.”

While at breakfast Shelton ran his eye rapidly over Bradshaw, and as soon as he’d finished, called for his bill, and told the waiter he should like to see the landlord.

“Good-morning, sir,” exclaimed that worthy, upon entering the room. “I hope you’ve nothing to complain of, but I’m told you’ve sent for your bill and want to see me.”

“Nothing, nothing I assure you, I have been most comfortable, but I find I’m compelled to return to Town immediately.”

“Well, that’s most provoking, I did reckon you’d stay two or three days with us, and was just going up to the Grange, to see if I could manage that little matter about the Paddocks for you. If I could get hold of Lightfoot the stud groom, or the Squire, I could work it I dessay.”

“Nothing I should have enjoyed more, but unluckily I must go.”

“Well, it’s real unfortunate ; I know you’d have liked it, and I could have pointed out to you all the likely young things, colts as will be winning good two-year-old races next year.”

“We can’t always do what we wish in this world. I found a letter at the post office this morning which compels my immediate return, I had my letters directed there, because I didn’t know what

was the name of the leading inn in Saxham, and you can't believe what you find in these railway guides. It just depends upon who chooses to advertise ; for instance, I should have put my foot into it nicely if I'd gone by Bradshaw. Here you are—'Principal Hotel, the Wrexford Arms.'"

"What!" exclaimed John Crowder, extending his hand for the book, which Shelton in reply to his mute appeal handed him. He gazed at it in silence for a minute or two, his face turning purple with indignation, and then exclaimed: "Well, d—n that fellow Field's impudence."

"I shall know better another time," said Shelton, smiling, "still, I suppose there is an inn in the place of that name?"

"There's a public house at the top of the hill that calls itself so, I believe without anyone's permission," said Mr. Crowder solemnly and with some confusion of language.

Mr. Shelton saw that he had unwittingly touched upon a tender subject, and at once proceeded to cut his farewell as short as possible. "Good-bye, Mr. Crowder," he said, "I've to thank you for a very pleasant evening last night. I only hope you may all win your money over Bobadil, and that it mayn't be long before I run down and see you again?"

"Do, sir, do," returned John Crowder, brightening up. "Come down the Saturday after Bobadil's won.

It will be a lively evening at the ‘Marquis of Granby,’ you bet your boots.”

Shelton laughed as he jumped into his trap, waved his hand and drove off to the station.

CHAPTER IX.

“MARTIN IS SATISFIED.”

IF Horace Barnes so far had thought very lightly of Bobadil’s pretensions for the Cæsarewitch, he was far too astute a practitioner not to recognise the pulse of the market. He was quick to notice that whoever it might be, there was an undoubted tendency to take the long odds about the colt.

This was quite enough to set Barnes making enquiry about the horse. It did not take him very long, any more than it did Shelton, to discover that Bobadil had changed hands and was now the property of Mr. Gauntlett. Although it had been a private sale, and so not at first attracted the attention of the public, there had never been any attempt at secrecy concerning it and in a little time the training reports mentioned Bobadil as galloping at Moorham with Martin’s string. This would probably have been noticed earlier, had the colt been of any repute. Now Barnes was quite aware that Martin trained for Gauntlett only, and at once saw that if the latter had purchased him before

accepting that big bet about Martin's lot at the Subscription rooms at Doncaster, Mr. Gauntlett's horses *were not* all struck out of the Cæsarewitch. He did not like the quiet way in which Bobadil was creeping up in the quotations. True he could not see what earthly chance the horse could have upon all his previous running, but Barnes was much too old a hand to stand heavily against a horse that was well backed and looked certain to start. He made enquiries in all directions as to the exact date upon which the colt had been sold, and speedily discovered that it was pretty well a month before Doncaster, and that, counting that big bet laid there and what he had laid since against the colt, he stood to lose a very heavy stake by Bobadil's success.

Taking all this in conjunction with the sums for which he had backed Plutarch, Barnes suddenly awoke to the fact that instead of being on the verge of standing to win a large sum of money at little or no risk he had simply made a muddle of it and got a very bad book in the Cæsarewitch. If he had only known. If he had only dreamt that Bobadil belonged to Gauntlett he could have made himself safe with little or no loss.

What a fool he had been, not to suspect something when he saw a man like Wrexford, who never raced, naming a horse; he ought to have known that there was some good reason for it; in Martin's stable too, dangerous Martin, who'd unexpectedly

carried off more handicaps than any trainer in England. He, poor fool, thinking all the time the colt was with Powell, a good, honest, muddling little man no doubt, but who must have greatness thrust upon him if ever he was to distinguish himself in his calling.

This discovery came to Barnes just before the first October meeting at Newmarket, and at that meeting it was speedily manifest that orders were out to back Bobadil from somebody; the price shortened rapidly and ominously. He quickly figured in the racing returns at a hundred to six with an intimation that that price would have been taken to money had it been procurable. By personal observation the bookmaker convinced himself that his brethren were growing shy of meddling with Bobadil, and Barnes felt convinced that it would not require a large outlay to make Bobadil a very hot favourite for the big race a fortnight hence.

"What does it all mean?" he enquired of Shelton. "What do you think of it? Who is it doing the commission?"

"I can't say," was the reply. "It's a very bad horse and belongs to a not over sharp young man," was the callous rejoinder.

"Has he won a big trial?" inquired Barnes eagerly.

"The touts swear the horse has never been tried at all. It's just one of those bubbles which we've

seen burst so often. Someone of the 'get on early sort' has issued a small commission for Bobadil in view of the horse's forthcoming trial, and the public are just tumbling over one another to be in 'the good thing.' Blest if I don't think they'll take six or seven to one before the week's out. Then will come the trial; the swan'll turn out a goose and it will be a case of 'What price, Bobadil?' and 'What will you take?'"

"Old Ikey Martin's geese are more apt to turn out swans," said another bookmaker, laughing. "I would not meddle with one of his till betting has quieted down. He had me once, and he don't do it again if I know it."

Bobadil's position in the betting occasioned Barnes an anxious time during the whole meeting. He could not discover that there was any commission from the stable to back the colt, and yet it was quite clear that though only once or twice had there been offers to back the horse really to money, yet smaller sums were being continually dribbled on to him. Barnes could not make up his mind as to whether it was merely the public backing the horse or whether a genuine commission from those connected with him was being most artfully worked. The sum-up, too, of the market movements at the end of the week, was far from reassuring. "Bobadil was firm, but quiet," said the report.

At Saxham Grange the advance of Robby Gaunt-

lett's horse was viewed also with the greatest possible interest. Miss Rose was especially jubilant on the subject. "Did I not tell you so?" was now a regular accompaniment to the morning paper. Ah, if that fair prophetess could but have foreseen what was to come of the prominent attitude that Bobadil had assumed in the Cæsarewitch betting her joyous predictions would have been changed to a wail of woe, such as escaped the lips of the luckless Cassandra, and been received with the like incredulity. Even the Squire was astounded at the manner in which his nomination was supported. However, he said :

"Robby's to be here next Monday, and then we shall know all about it. Old Martin must have discovered marvellous improvement in the colt if they entertain any hope of winning the Cæsarewitch with him. He's not likely to be fancied by anybody except those immediately connected with him."

"There you're wrong, papa," cried Miss Rosie. "All the village is mad about him and fully expect to have the bells ringing the week after next."

"Ah," said the Squire, laughing, "that's just because I named him. They'd like to see me win. They have memories of much ale flowing in the days when I was young."

"You're young still," replied Rosie, "and those grand old beery times are about to come again. It'll

be a regular Saturnalia, I suppose, and all Saxham will be more or less fuddled for the next day or two."

The Squire laughed again, as he replied "that there was not much fear of Saxham straying from the paths of sobriety if such depended on the contingency of Bobadil's success."

The week of the Croftstone Ball at length arrived and the Sunday's post brought a somewhat disappointing letter from Gauntlett. It was dated from Newmarket, and said that he could not possibly be with them on Monday, but should hope to be with them by dinner on Tuesday. Should he fail in that, he pledged himself to turn up for certain on Wednesday.

"I am quite keen," he added, "for a cut at the partridges and sha'n't lose a day, you may depend, if I can help it, but shall, at the worst, show myself in great dancing condition on Thursday."

"Oh, what a nuisance," exclaimed Miss Rosie, as her sister read out Robby's letter. "It's too bad of him, when he must know we're dying to know all about Bobadil, besides we want him here Monday evening. All the other people come that day."

"Yes, it is unlucky," said Miss Wrexford. "It always makes a ball pleasanter when the party you've got together for it have two or three days in which to get acquainted before hand; besides,

Henry's bringing down Mr. Lyster and Mr. Rooke. They're strangers to all of us, while Rob, I dare say, knows them both. We shall sadly miss his fun and spirits. As a mixer of the social pudding he's invaluable. He makes people know one another in no time."

However, the morrow saw the whole party assembled, with the exception of the delinquent—as Mrs. Wrexford said, cheerily, the house was as full as she could pack it; and, with the exception of the room reserved for Rob, she hadn't a place left in which she could swing a cat. Both the girls gazed with no little interest at Jim Lyster. Curtice had, unintentionally, excited their curiosity about him, and—as is often the case—they had pictured him as something very different from what he was. Miss Rosie, in particular, had drawn in her mind's eye, a blonde young giant of the Viking type, with marvellous thews and sinews and very indolent manner. Lyster was by no means this; a slight, fair man, rather above middle height, not to be considered tall; with no outward appearance of great physical strength, languid in speech and rather deliberate in manner, but hardly on first acquaintance to be recognised as endowed with that indolence which, though partially affected in some measure, undoubtedly possessed him.

"Well, Jin," said Rose Wrexford, as she slipped into her sister's room after dressing for dinner.

"I'm quite disappointed in Mr. Lyster, I expected to see a veritable Guy Livingstone, after Henry's story about the unnameable vengeance he took upon the man who insulted him. He's not bad-looking; but I should never have picked him out to be such a hero as Henry described him."

"Perhaps not, dear," replied Miss Wrexford. "However, he seems pleasant and agreeable; so does Mr. Rooke. Henry deserves every credit for his captures. I think we might have a waltz or two this evening, just to see how they dance, and whether our steps suit, you know."

"Oh, yes, that will be delightful," cried the younger sister; and, without more ado, she almost danced down the staircase, in anticipation.

Both girls noticed that when the Squire, at dinner, expressed his disappointment at Gauntlett's not having turned up, neither Rooke nor Lyster expressed the slightest surprise.

"'Tis very provoking," said Jenny to the latter, who had taken her in to dinner. "We know there's no racing going on at Newmarket, and cannot think what is keeping him down in a dull little town like that."

"Fellows who keep race-horses, like your cousin, Miss Wrexford, have a lot of things to see about. Lots of horses will be tried there this week, with a view to ascertaining what they can do next. Fellows like to see their horses tried, you know—

Gauntlett, most likely, has something of that sort in hand."

"Do you think he's trying Bobadil? We are all so interested in that horse—papa bred him, you know."

"Quite likely. The report at Newmarket last week was that he hadn't been tried, so far. I saw your cousin there, but though I know him I'm not intimate enough with him to justify me in asking such a home-question as that would be, and he did not say anything about it."

"We are all so anxious for his success," said Jenny. "Not only on his own account, but because we like to see a Saxham horse win."

"Then I'm sure I hope Bobadil may be successful. I fancy, when Gauntlett arrives, that he will be able to tell you, at all events, whether he's sweet upon his chance."

Jenny Wrexford and her neighbour were soon upon excellent terms. A clever girl herself, she quickly discovered that, in spite of his affectation, Lyster was a well-read, sensible man. He talked well, and had seen a good deal of the world in various phases and, with anyone he thought it was worth while to take the trouble, Jim could be a most amusing companion; and when the ladies left the dining-room, he stood pledged, not only to assist in the impromptu dance, which Jenny contemplated, but had secured her hand for the

first turn. Left to their wine, the men, as was natural, got talking about the big Handicap, to be decided at Newmarket, in the ensuing week, and one of the Squire's old friends bluntly asked him what he thought of the chance of his own nomination; to which the Squire briefly replied—that the horse belonged to his nephew, and that he knew nothing whatever about it. The dance proved a great success, and the whole party were soon on good terms with each other; Rose remarking triumphantly to her sister, as they tripped up-stairs to bed: "Splendid idea of yours, Jin, we've knocked all the stiffness out of them, and are going to have a real good week, and a real good ball, I'm certain."

That night the Squire cautioned his wife to warn the girls not to worry their cousin Robby with questions about Bobadil. "Nobody," he said, "can disapprove of plunging in the way Rob does more than myself, but when a man is known to bet heavily, you've no right to question him about training secrets, any more than you have about any other of his private affairs. If we were only a family party, it wouldn't so much signify, but we're not, and it's quite likely that Rob would very much dislike being worried on the subject. Now, I don't want that; I'm going to have a serious talk with him before he leaves, and that will be quite worry enough for both of us. Don't forget."

Gauntlett arrived next day barely in time to dress for dinner, and no one therefore had an opportunity of greeting him until he made his appearance in the drawing-room. Warned by their mother, the girls strictly abstained from making any inquiry concerning Bobadil, although, as Rose afterwards said, the effort all but choked her, and the evening passed, not a little to Robby's surprise, without the slightest allusion to Bobadil, but when the adjournment took place to the smoking-room Gauntlett himself introduced the subject.

"I daresay, uncle," he said, "you're a little curious about how your nominee is going on. You must have seen that he's been creeping up in the betting for the last fortnight."

The Squire nodded, but made no reply.

"Well," continued Gauntlett, "that rather puzzles me; we can't make out who the deuce is backing the colt."

"Ah!" said the Squire, laughing, "I think I can tell you. I'm told all the village is backing him."

"That would hardly account for it in such a heavy betting race. All the money Saxham would bet upon it would scarcely be sufficient."

"You won't be offended, Gauntlett," said Lyster, "but Mr. Wrexford, I fancy, will endorse what I say—Old Martin, clever fellow, and all that no doubt, but he's always had the character of helping himself. Likes his little bit on first, you know."

“Quite true,” said the Squire, “I always told you, Rob, he was shifty though clever.”

“It may be that,” said Gauntlett slowly, “but, by Jove, he is clever. I should never have dreamt of buying Bobadil if it hadn’t been for him. I can only tell you now that judging from what I saw this morning the Cæsarewitch is in my pocket.”

“Had a satisfactory trial?” said Lyster.

“A rattler,” returned Gauntlett. “Old Martin was thoroughly satisfied, and said that although there might be something dark we didn’t know about, he had tried the colt good enough to win nine Cæsarewitches out of ten. Now, though, the cat’ll be out of the bag to-morrow, for I put a big commission in the market to-day—I’d rather you fellows didn’t speak of it. Anyone who likes can stand a pony with me. You’ll get a better price probably than backing it for yourselves. What do you say, uncle?”

“Well, Rob,” rejoined the Squire, “you’re a sanguine young man, and I hope for your sake that old Martin’s right, but I’d rather not back it.”

Henry Curtice also said that betting was out of his line, but Brooke and Lyster thankfully accepted Gauntlett’s offer, and the whole party retired to rest, it may be presumed to dream of “a veritable garden of Bendemeer,” the result of Bobadil’s success.

CHAPTER X.

SHELTON'S ADVICE.

ALTHOUGH a quarter of a century ago the result of a trial was not reported with the accuracy and rapidity it is now, still there have been horse-watchers ever since there has been racing, and the touts of those days were not very far behind their brethren of the present time. Barnes, and the little coterie of which he was the presiding spirit, stood on the famous heath the morning after Bobadil's trial, in deep discussion; they had just tried Plutarch so satisfactorily as to convince them that the Cæsarewitch was within their grasp, but they had also awoke to the fact that they had a most dangerous opponent in Gauntlett's colt, and the worst of it was, they could form no estimate of what their own horse would be able to do with him. That he had had a great trial and won it they knew, but they could not in the least get at what that trial had been. They could measure the chances, more or less, of all the other competitors, but it was impossible to arrive at any conclusion about Bobadil. It was aggravating in the extreme to think that so big a *coup* should run the risk of not coming off. The little group cudgelled their brains as to how

they could gauge Bobadil's form, and then, not being of a scrupulous turn of mind, and not being able to solve this problem, they began to talk over the possibility of insuring Bobadil's defeat. The success of a racehorse is in the hands of a good many people, the trainer, the jockey, or even some of the stable lads can easily prevent his winning. The question was, whether any of these could be bribed to extinguish Bobadil's chance. Although nothing had ever been proved against old Isaac Martin, yet he certainly was regarded as a man keenly alive to his own interests and one who would lose or win a race according as it appeared to him most profitable.

On one point Barnes's friends were agreed, namely, that if they did not succeed in buying the trainer himself, he would take very good care that you did not tamper with his subordinates. The jockey too, engaged for Gauntlett's colt, bore a high character for honesty and was not likely to yield to any temptation such as they were inclined to suggest. They came to the conclusion at length that the first thing to do was to make overtures to Martin and ascertain how much would make it worth his while to clear the way for Plutarch's success. To Barnes this was a matter of far greater moment than it was to his colleagues; to them it did not mean much actual loss, nothing but the disappointment of not winning a large stake; but to Barnes the triumph of Bobadil meant a great deal more

than this, it meant absolute ruin. Every shilling he had in the world would not suffice to discharge his liabilities, if Mr. Gauntlett's colt won. Credit to a bookmaker is as the air he breathes, once brand him a defaulter, and his vocation is gone, and though he may and often does commence afresh, Barnes knew all the weariness of beginning again at the bottom of the ladder and working his way upwards. It was not to be thought of, such a prize on one side, ruin on the other; no, cost what it might, Bobadil must not win. How it was to be prevented he did not as yet see, but Horace Barnes felt quite as resolute in his determination as the Roman Senate when they pronounced the doom of Carthage.

As agreed, the confederacy lost no time in diplomatically approaching old Martin, but their agent quickly reported to his employers that he saw but little prospect of coming to any terms with the trainer. "The fact is," he said, "that what with having backed it at the long prices, and his former experience of Mr. Gauntlett's liberality, it will probably be more lucrative to him on this occasion to win than to lose; at all events, we shall have to put down a large sum and I'm not sure that he would do it, even then." That Horace Barnes should counsel buying Martin at any price was only natural, but his associates did not quite take the same view of the matter, they were not in the same

scrape that he was, and the fox that had lost his tail we know failed to obtain much sympathy from the other foxes. If he had much over-laid Bobadil, they had not, and the result of Gauntlett's commission had been to make the colt first favourite, and render Barnes's getting out of his imprudent speculations not only difficult but impossible except at a heavy loss.

It is all very well to say a thing must be prevented, but circumstances are sometimes too strong for us. Barnes had rapidly come to the conclusion that Bobadil's winning was to be hindered at all hazards, and he was prepared to stick at nothing that would insure that colt's defeat, but for the life of him he could not tell how to set about it. All the more ordinary means of bringing that about seemed impossible, the corrupting of those connected with him, as far as he could make out, was not to be accomplished. It was not the first time that Horace Barnes had found himself in a big scrape, and had failed to see his way out of it. There was that card-playing business, for instance, which had necessitated his retirement from the University. He had long ago forfeited his original social status, and though holding a more reputable position amongst his professional brethren than he deserved, was a man only recognised by those of his own station on the race-course. Still, such as it was, he held a fair position and was earning a good

income; if he utterly came to grief in his present business he literally would not know how to get a living. He had known what it was to be in very narrow straits, when after his expulsion from Cambridge he first came to London. He was a man of luxurious tastes, fond of good living, well furnished rooms, etc., and he did not at all relish the idea of the life before him in the event of Bobadil's success; while, on the contrary, the triumph of Plutarch would make a wealthy man of him. Besides living at his ease, it was also his ambition to be quite one of the leading speculators of the ring; and in this latter case he would be possessed of capital sufficient to justify his aspiring to that position. The prospect of all this was not to be resigned without a struggle, but then again came the question, what was to be done? He could think of no way by which he could influence the result of the Cæsarewitch one iota. If Plutarch or something else was not good enough to beat Bobadil, he was a ruined man.

Ruminating rather grimly over his prospects he was strolling along the Strand after the negotiations with Martin had proved a failure, when he came across Shelton.

"Well," said the latter, "the cat's out of the bag now with a vengeance; old Martin's horse is a red hot favourite, you must have rather burnt your fingers over it; you stand pretty bad against the colt, I should think."

"Yes," rejoined Barnes, "I have laid more against him than I like ; the race is not over yet, and you and I have seen many a hot favourite go down in our time. Gauntlett and his friends seem very confident."

"Confident ! By Jove ! if you want to see confidence, if you want to see people who look on it as if it were all over but shouting, you should go down to Tom Wrexford's place ; business took me down to Saxham a week or two back, and they all swear down there that Bobadil will win easily."

"What took you down to Saxham ?" enquired Barnes.

"A matter of business," replied the other ; "you have kept all your business transactions pretty close to yourself of late, it would serve you right if I did the same. I don't know what your little game is this time, but if you had been as friendly as you used to be I could have told you to take back your Bobadil money a fortnight ago."

"Then why the devil didn't you ?" said Barnes savagely.

"Because you weren't treating me like a pal," replied Shelton.

"And they all believe in it down there ?" enquired Barnes.

"Rather," replied Shelton. "I don't suppose there's a soul in the village that hasn't backed it—stop, I forgot, there's one fellow, a queer character, who hasn't ; he's the 'ostler of the inn there, and is

ambitious to belong to our noble fraternity ; he has to content himself with wagering in half-crowns at present, but if ever he gets capital and so is able to go about racing, he'll get on. Whatever he lays against, you'd better follow suit, for upon my oath I believe he'd murder owner, jockey, trainer and horse, if he'd the chance, sooner than lose his money. A rum beggar," he continued musingly, "a bit off his head, I should think ; half miser, half gambler, but with method in his madness for all that."

"Now, Shelton, let's have no beating about the bush. You somehow suspected that Bobadil was worth backing for next Wednesday, and have been doing all you know to find out ; have you backed him ? "

"No, I wish I had, but I could make nothing out of it ; as for those people at Saxham, all they know is that the colt was bred there, and that their Squire nominated it, that's enough for them, with the exception of my friend, Dick, the half-witted ostler. Half-witted indeed !" said Shelton, "he knows more than all the village put together, but question for question, are you in this Plutarch business ? "

Barnes nodded.

"Pretty deeply," he answered at length, "it's the best thing I ever was in in my life, and to think that such a *coup* stands the chance of being bowled over, it's maddening."

"Very annoying," said Shelton, with a slight sneer; "old Martin don't make many mistakes in his trials, and from the way they backed Bobadil, it looks as if *you* would have a very bad race. Well, you've kept the good thing to yourself this time, and upon the whole it's as well. I'm well out of it."

"Look here, Shelton," exclaimed Barnes excitedly, "I never stood to win such a stake before; for Heaven's sake help me, advise me what to do."

"My good fellow," replied the other coldly, "you can't expect me to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for you."

"Of course not," replied Barnes eagerly, "you shall have a share in it, my good fellow; it's a big thing, and will stand a little more dividing, only tell me how to stop Bobadil."

"If you'll make a clean breast of it, let me see how you stand, and agree to give me what I consider a fair share of the plunder—it's a bargain. I suppose you've tried what's to be done with old Martin?"

Barnes nodded and shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah!" replied Shelton in answer to the gesture "that makes the thing difficult. He looks pretty closely after things himself when he means business, but come somewhere where we can be quiet and talk the thing over. If we deal I'll tell you what to do," and without further words he turned down a side street and led the way into a quiet, unpretentious, though well-known tavern. Having ordered

some refreshment as an excuse for their being there, Shelton prepared to listen to Barnes's story.

He was surprised at the magnitude of the stake for which his companion was playing; his natural cupidity was aroused, and now that he was promised a share in the affair, his mouth positively watered to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. When Barnes told him of Plutarch's trial he got quite enthusiastic, and exclaimed, "Why, my good fellow, the horse is good enough to win on its merits; I should much doubt Bobadil or anything else being able to beat him."

"Perhaps so," rejoined the other, "but we can form no opinion about the favourite; we know he was no good at six or seven furlongs, but we've never seen him tried over a distance; we are quite in the dark about him, and when you are playing for a fortune it don't do to run a risk of this kind if you can help it."

"Quite right, just so," replied Shelton, "and this to you means more, remember, than to anyone else; as you say, if Gauntlett's colt wins, you're ruined; now it's no use talking about the jockey; Rice we know is not to be tempted, the fool prides himself on his character. This is a very ticklish case; it's a magnificent stake to miss, such a chance only comes to a man once in his life-time; of course you may pull it off, but there's only one thing can make you tolerably safe."

"And that is——?" asked Barnes eagerly.

"The death of Bobadil's nominator," said Shelton in a low voice, and as he spoke he looked his companion very straight in the face.

"What! the death of old Wrexford!" stammered Barnes. "Why, there's—there's nothing the matter with him."

"No," returned the other, "but accidents will happen, and if an accident don't befall the horse it certainly will be a lucky thing for you if an accident befall the man who has nominated him for the race."

"Why, good Heavens!" exclaimed Barnes, "you don't mean to suggest——?"

"Any more foolish talk," interrupted the bolder villain. "I only said what a lucky thing it would be for you if anything did happen to Mr. Wrexford before this day week. It's a stake worth playing for; I should be very sorry for the Squire at Saxham if my friend Dick had a tenth of the money depending on such a result."

"And you would advise——?" said Barnes in a low, hoarse voice.

"Oh, I advise nothing," said the other as he rose, "I must be off now, but shall still hope something may intervene in your favour. By the way, if I was you I should just run down to Saxham and enquire about Wrexford's health," and nodding to his friend, Shelton strolled out of the room.

As for Horace Barnes, he remained seated at the

table for near upon an hour after the other had left him. From the expression of his face, his thoughts were evidently of the most sombre character, and two stiff glasses of brandy and water seemed in no way to lighten his bosom; whether thoughts of murder had seriously entered his soul who shall say? but there could be no possibility of mistaking as to what Shelton's suggestions pointed. As for that precious scoundrel, as he made his way back to his own dwelling, he murmured reflectively:

"I wonder whether he has the pluck? it's a tremendous stake, and as is always the case is not to be brought off without running some risk; conspirators always chance their lives and liberty; this is doing no more, and as far as ending one's days in luxury is a greater certainty than being one of the leaders in a successful revolution."

CHAPTER XI.

"THE CROFTSTONE BALL."

"HAVE you had a good day, Rob?" inquired Rosie Wrexford as she encountered her cousin in the hall on his return from shooting.

"Capital!" was the reply, "we were lucky with the birds, shot straight, and have all come home on good terms with ourselves."

"It's to be hoped you'll continue on good terms for the rest of the night. Croftstone, remember,

expects every man this night to do his duty. Your having been shooting constitutes no excuse for laziness in the ball-room."

"Never fear," replied Gauntlett, "such walking as we have done has only stretched our legs, we are all going to dance the Croftstone ball out, down to the very last kick of Sir Roger. But where's my uncle?"

"Where should he be," replied the girl laughing, "but strolling across the park to his beloved paddock to have a few words with Lightfoot; you know he often goes there just before sunset."

"Ah! I'd forgotten; let's walk down and meet him."

Nothing loth, Miss Rosie snatched her hat from the hall table, and the pair walked across towards the stud farm; neither of them likely to forget that walk as long as they live.

"It's terrible," said the girl at length, "I can contain myself no longer, I'm dying with suppressed curiosity. There is Bobadil first favourite for the Cæsarewitch, and we are told we mustn't ask your lordship the slightest question about him."

"Ah, well!" he replied, laughing, "all restrictions are done with now. I expect him to win, and to win a lot of money over him to boot. By the way, I must have a serious talk with your father before I leave the Grange, can you guess what it's about, Rosie?"

"You've not been getting into scrapes with that dreadful betting, have you, Rob? Why do you do it?"

Papa's always grumbling about it, and says you're sure to come to grief over it."

"Well, I have been a bit unlucky of late, and he knows it, but never mind, next Wednesday will put all that to rights, and retrieve my shattered fortunes."

"Oh, Rob, I'm afraid you've got a deal of money on it," she exclaimed piteously. "I am so sorry. Papa says that it never comes off when that is the case; he is always preaching against the high betting of the present day, and says that gambling for the last stake, as he calls it, always results in disaster. I've been crowing so too about Bobadil, telling everyone that he was sure to win, and now—now I feel quite frightened about it."

"Don't be such a little coward; you not to believe in a Saxham horse—disgraceful. I tell you he is sure to pull me through."

"I hope so, but I wish you hadn't such a lot of money on it. Will it be very bad if you lose, Rob?" and she dropped her voice almost to a whisper.

"Well, it will be unpleasant, but it will be time enough to fret about it when Bobadil's beat; that's not what I want to talk to your father about. I want him to give me something, can't you guess what?"

The girl's cheek flushed, but she merely shook her head.

"I want him to give me you."

"*Merci, Monsieur!* but don't you think that you'd better have consulted someone else on that point in

the first instance? Daughters are not given away nowadays like sheep or oxen."

"Forgive me, darling," said her cousin, as he drew the little hand within his arm.

"Upon my word," she said, "you are treating me as a mere nonentity; considering that the proposal is for myself, I think I'm entitled to be consulted. Hadn't you better hear what I have to say before troubling papa?"

"As if, Rosie dearest, you didn't know all about it, as if you didn't know I'd been in love with you for ever so long past, I've only waited till you grew old enough to tell you so."

"And I, eighteen," she said laughing.

"But you will give me yourself, darling, won't you? You know I've loved you all along and I've hoped that you loved me."

"Ah, Rob, my dear, I'm afraid I do, but there's one thing."

"What's that?" he enquired anxiously.

"Don't you think you've been a very dilatory young man?"

Her cousin clasped her in his arms, and promptly exacted the penalty of her sauciness.

"That will do, Rob," she exclaimed, as she released herself, "if I had known the consequences I should never have ventured to call you a laggard in love."

Then they walked on, indulging in that conversa-

tion common to all lovers, and which can have varied but little, I fancy, since the world began ; a theme which, though of never-failing interest to the talkers, is wont to be tinged with considerable sameness except to those immediately concerned. Two or three minutes more and they encountered the Squire.

"I couldn't think who it was," he exclaimed, "it's not often I meet anybody coming back from the Paddocks. Is this accident or design, Rosie?"

"We came to meet you, papa," cried the girl, "to bring you home to tea. Don't you know they are administering that, or even stronger refreshments if required, to all the gentlemen just now? We can't have any faint-heartedness in the ball-room to-night, and we are determined at all events they shall not say it's for lack of sustenance."

The party assembled round the tea-table in the drawing-room were all in the best of spirits, there was no apparent reason they should not be, they had all passed a pleasant day, and had a pleasant evening to look forward to. Some of the elders, it is true, might think there were weary hours to come after supper which could be passed more pleasantly and profitably in bed, but they were neither tired nor bored as yet, and consequently looked forward to their fate with perfect equanimity, still nobody could have guessed that the gayest of them all had a fortune depending on a horse race in the ensuing

week, and, moreover, the hand of the girl he loved. In the first intoxication of hearing Rose acknowledge her love for him, and in all the exaltation that the successful trial of his horse had produced, Rob Gauntlett had quite forgotten all the doubts and anxieties that had beset him a little previously as to the result of his love-suit, he quite forgot that the more serious part of his mission to Saxham had yet to be accomplished. Rose Wrexford had said "Yes," but what would the Squire say? All reflections of this sort he cast to the winds for the evening, the present at all events was his own, and he would make the most of it.

It was very a good ball indeed, as every one said, the best ball Croftstone had seen for years. The Squire was in as high spirits as the youngest of his party, chatting with his old friends in every direction, while the young men of the party were doing their *devoirs* gallantly. Both Rob Gauntlett and Curtice were known to all the neighbourhood, and many were the questions put to the former, as to Bobadil's prospects in the coming week. That noble animal's success indeed was positively in part discounted, and people shook hands and congratulated Rob, as if the Cæsarewitch were veritably over.

"Upon my word, Miss Wrexford," exclaimed Lyster, at the end of a tremendous after-supper galop, "this is the quickest thing in balls I ever remember."

"It is a good ball, isn't it?" said Jenny, "and as for you, Mr. Lyster, I think you must have had a very good time, for I noticed you contrived to get hold of two or three of the prettiest and nicest girls in the room."

"When a fellow gets a good start, he's a bit of a duffer if he can't keep it, and you've all taken such care of us Londoners in that way. It would have been disgraceful if we hadn't had a good time. No idea, upon my word, I could last like this, begin to think I've latent dancing powers in me that only want developing."

"I am sure you have," replied Jenny, "mind you don't let it rust, and now perhaps you will take me back to our headquarters; I've another partner who is, or should be, searching madly for me."

But a ball is always productive of disappointment to some people, and on this occasion, Henry Curtice was the man to whom the evening seemed flat, stale, and unprofitable. He was essentially not a ball-room man, he went to them and did a fair amount of dancing as a necessary consequence, but he regarded it all as some of the compulsory small change of society, which a man must pay if he would mix in it. Dancing was no pleasure to him, and the majority of his partners failed to interest him. In short, this clever ambitious young man was rather too apt just at present to look upon the amusements of life solely as stepping-stones to his

own career and advancement. He was attending the Croftstone Ball for a purpose, that purpose being the advancement of his suit to his cousin Jenny, and he was conscious that he was not advancing that in the slightest degree. A pretty, popular girl like Jenny was sure to have her card well filled, and the consequence was that he only achieved one or two dances with her. Still Curtice was not at all the man to be deterred by a trifle of this sort; he meant to marry his cousin and was not even likely to take "No" for an answer, a man not to be overcome by a rebuff and slow to convince that anything he earnestly desired was unattainable. Though disappointed that he was not progressing quicker, he took comfort in his homeward drive from the fact that though Jenny's admirers were numerous, she did not seem inclined to favour one unduly at the expense of the remainder. "Patience," he muttered to himself, "everything, they say, comes to a man who knows how to wait, and most things come to the man who doggedly says *they shall*."

As for Lyster, as he laid his head on the pillow, his reflections ran somehow in this wise:

"Very jolly house, very jolly people; best thing Curtice can do, considering what he's told me about the Squire's intentions regarding the property, is to marry one of the girls, they are both as nice as they make 'em, he couldn't go wrong, though the eldest for choice. The Squire'd never object to a

steady old coach like Henry for a son-in-law, the fellow will certainly some day sit on the Woolsack, or some of the other sacks that legal big wigs do sit upon; as for Rob Gauntlett, the Squire's too full against plunging to make his chance worth much consideration; this Cæsarewitch may save him for a time, I hope it may, but I'm afraid grief will be the undoubted finish of poor Robby Gauntlett."

To know what half one's friends think about us would make life hard to bear, but to know what they think it behoves us to do would render life intolerable, they do at times favour us with unsolicited advice, and how rarely it accords with our own views on the subject. Professions and callings for which we know ourselves unfitted are perpetually urged upon us; splendid openings are suggested to us which we feel would result in hopeless failures in our hands. If it is hard for a man to find out what he is best fitted for in this world, it is still harder for his friends to find out for him, and yet what a lot of good people there are always anxious to determine this knotty point for us. It is fair to presume that we all came into this world to do something, but alas, there are those amongst us who seem most fitted to do *nothing*, and of whom, after bitter experience, their friends are compelled to own that their only hope is that they may do no worse. But if there is one thing which friends and relations think they can settle to your advan-

tage, it is matrimony, and if there is one subject more than another in which their interference is inexcusable, it is this. Even Jim Lyster, although not as yet intruding his advice, has already arranged Henry Curtice's marriage for him, and in this case Jim's views are quite in accord with his own. What the lady may think about it is not troubling Lyster's head, he seems to be much of Curtice's own opinion that he may bring the thing about if he wills.

As for Rosie Wrexford, although she had a hazy perception that her engagement would not altogether meet with her father's approval, still in all the triumph of a girl's first love she shut her eyes to any difficulties there might be as closely as her lover. Of course, Rob would have to give up betting, and her father would be cross and grumpy over it, but he never had refused her anything, and it was sure to come all right in the end. She had had a glorious ball, and if ever a girl sank into a happy slumber, to dream of bright to-morrows, it was Rose Wrexford.

The next morning brought several reflections to Gauntlett; he knew that an interview with his uncle had to be gone through, and was fully conscious that it was not likely to be a pleasant one. He knew that his uncle's consent was by no means to be counted on, and the thought flashed across his mind of whether he might not as well postpone speaking to him until after the Cæsarewitch was

over. Bah! that was childish, cowardly, unfair to Rosie. No! he would have it out with his uncle at once. The sooner he knew the worst the better, and Rob was quite aware that there would be "a worse" to hear of some sort, and that the Squire's consent would be only to be won under certain pledges and conditions.

The party in a great measure dispersed next morning although the Squire hospitably pressed the young men to have another day at the partridges, and so walk off the effects of last night's carnival, yet Lyster and Rooke both decided to return to Town.

"Always a mistake to stay in a country-house Charlie after the thing's culminated, and last night was the coruscation of the meeting, the reaction's sure to set in to-night; it's been a delightful visit, and the Wrexford girls are charming. I shall be off by the afternoon train."

"Well, I suppose it would be best, though I don't think Curtice is going to-day."

"Sure it would," returned Lyster, "under any circumstances, but there's thunder in the air besides."

"What the deuce do you mean?" enquired Rooke.

"Just this; I happened to hear Robby Gauntlett tell the Squire he wanted to have a quiet talk with him in his study, and his uncle replied, 'All right, Rob, as soon as you like after breakfast. I, too, have something to say to you.' Now I don't pretend to

know what that palaver's going to be about, but from a general knowledge of the relations between uncles and nephews that 'plunge,' I fancy it's likely to develop a crispness of temper on both sides—dissatisfaction and all that sort of thing. The Squire's a good-tempered fellow, I should say, but when the master of the house is put out, the family all round usually know it."

"All right, old man," said Rooke, "we'll go." And even before the carriage came round to take them to the station Rooke saw occasion to admit that Lyster was wise in his generation.

The interview between Gauntlett and his nephew although not stormy, had a sorrowful termination to both men. Rob went straight to the point, and told his tale in a straightforward, manly fashion; he admitted that he had been a fool, and had considerably damaged the property that had come to him from his father, but said there would be enough left for him still to keep a wife, and if the Squire would give him Rose, he declared he would give up betting altogether—or racing either if it came to that, fond as he was of it.

His uncle had heard him in silence up to this, but now he exclaimed, "Stop, Rob, I am very sorry it has come to this between you and Rosie. I had no inkling of it until after I'd asked you here for this week, and had hoped that nothing definite would be said by you during your visit. You know very well

that it is not racing I object to, or even to betting. What I object to is such betting as constitutes gambling; only a few days ago I received a letter from your mother, imploring me to interfere, and use all the influence I have, to induce you to give up staking money in the reckless way you do; it *can* only end one way—a brief gleam of success at the best, and ruin certain to finish with. Nothing would induce me to give my consent to any daughter of mine marrying a gambler.”

“But, my dear Uncle, don’t I tell you I mean to give it up,” pleaded Rob.

“Yes, and here you are risking another large stake on this coming Cæsarewitch. An old race-goer like myself knows that a horse with Bobadil’s poor credentials never became so hot a favourite for a big race without a heavy commission from the stable had been placed in the market.”

“But, Uncle, when I assure you that this is the last time, that I will never risk such a sum again, that I will sell every race-horse I own, if you wish it.”

“Little use that would be,” replied the Squire, as he shook his head mournfully; “as if men do not gamble over horse-racing who never owned a race-horse. The most incorrigible punter I ever knew was a respectable tradesman who, although he had a bet upon every big race throughout the year, assured me he had never seen one run. Confirmed gambling is the most difficult vice to break yourself of

that's known; for anything bar this, I would willingly take your word."

"You mean to say," cried Rob passionately, "that because I've been fool enough to gamble in my youth, that you think I can never give it up, that nothing would ever induce you to give me Rose?"

"No," said the Squire gravely, "I will not go quite so far as that. I say this, you are both young, and can afford to wait. Convince me that you are not a gambler, and in three years' time ask me the same question again, and I may give you a very different answer to that which I have given you this morning. I don't tell you to sell your stud at all—as I explained to you that would go little way to convince me of your reform."

"Three years is a long time for probation. Besides, a wife by my side will go far to strengthen me in my resolution."

"You think so," said the Squire, drily. "I differ from you; the time is not a bit too long in my judgment. I shall run some risk even then. If you assure me, at the time I name, that you have broken yourself of the habit, and my own observation leads me to the same conclusion, I will give you Rosie, and give her you with real pleasure."

The young man rose and thanked his uncle, and was about to leave the room, by no means dissatisfied with his interview. That the Squire would lay an embargo upon his gambling he was prepared

for, that he might stipulate for some delay in their marriage he also thought probable, and though the probation exacted did seem to Rob of cruelly protracted length, still things might have been worse. His hand was on the door when his uncle said :

“Stop ; I’ve a few words more to say to you. You may or may not have heard of my intention of making an heir to the Grange. I announced it very openly after my own poor boy’s death and therefore the probabilities are, you have. You are more fitted to take my place here than Henry. Your tastes are more those of a country gentleman than his, you would be of more use to the people than he could possibly be, engrossed, as he naturally will be, in his profession ; but don’t build upon that, Rob ; the question is not as yet decided, but rest assured I will never leave Saxham, any more than I would give my daughter, to a gambler.”

“My dear Uncle,” cried Rob, “I have never given Saxham a thought. I hope to see you master here for many a long day yet, but believe me, whatever you may do with Saxham, no one will be more sorry to have lost you than I shall be.”

“I believe you, Rob,” said the Squire, “and to do you justice, I believe you want my girl for herself and not for what she will bring you, and that you will be sincerely sorry when I am gone. One thing more ; after you’ve said good-bye to her this time, you must give me your promise not to

attempt to see Rose again till you have my permission."

"Oh, Uncle!" cried Rob, perfectly aghast at this new stipulation, "you surely cannot mean that I am not to see her for three years?"

"No, I do not mean that, but that you two should have come to an understanding is bad enough already. I don't mean to make things harder for her, if you should fail in your resolution. As for my permission to see her, it will depend entirely on yourself. You give me your promise?"

"I do," replied Rob, ruefully, "but don't be too hard upon me. I've been a fool, and am paying for my folly. Don't be harder upon me than you can help."

CHAPTER XII.

LONG ODDS ON BOBADIL.

FOR a good out and out blackguard, said the late Mr. Slick, give me a gentleman who has turned "leg," and the Attaché was a shrewd judge of human nature. To say that Horace Barnes was already meditating such a crime as Shelton darkly suggested, would not be quite the truth, but it is certain that he had begun to familiarize himself with the idea that Tom Wrexford's life stood between himself and fortune—that any fatal accident to the Squire of Saxham would be an inestimable boon to him, and finally came to the

conclusion that he would take Shelton's advice and run down to the Kentish village and ascertain for himself whether there was the slightest chance of Providence intervening in his behalf. When men begin to brood over an idea of this kind, it results at times in their constituting themselves Providence, and discovering a little later that the laws of their country have also assumed the supreme power in the matter of life or death.

Barnes was by no means the daring, unflinching ruffian who would boldly put an end to anyone who stood in his way without taking more than reasonable regard for his own safety; he was cunning, crafty and uncrupulous, but he had an eminent respect for his own skin, and a very wholesome dislike to any collision with the law. Social or moral laws he would contravene without compunction, but he shrank from the idea of imprisonment. Although not physically brave he would sooner risk his life than his liberty. To his sensuous, luxurious nature a long term of penal servitude represented a more terrible fate than the gallows; he would rather die than live a life of hardship and indigence. If he was to be bereft of all the pleasures and enjoyments which alone seemed to his animal nature to make life worth living, well, then the sooner he had done with this world the better, and the victory or defeat of Bobadil in the fast approaching handicap re-

presented to him these two alternatives —on the one hand, wealth and all that wealth confers for the remainder of his existence ; on the other, years of qualid poverty which he loathed and detested. Such were the thoughts that had been fermenting in Barnes's brain ever since that confidential talk he had had with Shelton and which had so far resolved themselves into nothing more than the determination to go down to Saxham. It was now Saturday morning, and on Wednesday the big handicap was to be run. He had even scantier time for deliberation than Macbeth ; not only was it well it were done quickly, but it *must* be done quickly to be of any good to Horace Barnes.

On his arrival at Saxham he drove to the "Wrex-ford Arms," having been beguiled by the advertisement in Bradshaw of the go-ahead proprietor of that hostelry ; he had forgotten to ask Shelton where he had put up on the occasion of his visit, he had only seen that worthy once since he had taken him into his confidence, and upon that occasion Shelton had told him that he had thrown in his lot with the Plutarch party. "I'm going to be a man or a mouse over it, I have taken all you were good enough to give me of the Plutarch money and have laid my book right out against Bobadil. Of course I have only laid the short prices, and his winning don't mean to me what it does to you ; still, though not ruined, I shall have a bad race if he pokes his nose in first."

"And if Plutarch wins," interrupted Barnes bitterly, "you'll win pretty nearly as much as I shall."

"No, no," replied Shelton, in somewhat deprecatory fashion, "nothing like so much ; it's a great *coup*, beautifully planned, and I've a firm conviction it will come off. Something or other will happen to Bobadil, something *must* happen to prevent his winning, and everyone will say, it's just like Gauntlett's luck, as if luck wasn't to be controlled both at cards and racing by those who understand the game." And with that the two men had parted.

Installed at the "Wrexford Arms," Barnes at once began to make enquiries about the family at the Grange, and the first thing that struck him was that the inn did not seem to resemble that described by Shelton. He at once asked if this was the principal inn in the place, and needless to say was told it was, although the waiter, when pressed as to whether there was any other, admitted there was an old-fashioned coaching inn, which was still used, he believed, by the farmers. However, what was going on at the Grange and who was staying there was pretty well known all over Saxham, and as to what was doing up at the big house, the "Wrexford Arms" could tell just as much as the "Marquis of Granby." Barnes was speedily in possession of the news of the Grange, that the house had been full to the roof for the Croftstone Ball (waiter much surprised that Barnes had never heard of the Croftstone Ball) a

great ball in these parts, the waiter assured him; Mr. Gauntlett and a lot of London gentlemen had been down for it, that Bobadil was sure to win the Cæsarewitch. Mr. Gauntlett had told everybody so at the ball, and everybody in Saxham had backed it—"got half-a-sovereign on it myself, sir," said the waiter parenthetically, "don't know if you ever speculate yourself, sir, but this is a rare good thing. I'm told all the gentlemen at the Grange are going for it. The party's all broke up now, I believe, there's only the family left. I suppose the Squire will be off on Monday; he's very fond of a bit of racing, and what with having bred the horse, and named the horse, and its belonging to his own nephew and all, I should think he'd go up to see it win, sir, shouldn't you?"

"I have never thought of that," muttered Barnes, "nothing more likely. He'll probably leave on Monday; of course he will, what a fool I was not to think of it before; this is a nice place to have come to for a man to whom Bobadil's victory means ruin. Curse the brute! I'll take a stroll down the yard and have a talk with that ostler that Shelton talked about, he might turn out useful; at all events it will be a comfort to talk to somebody who thinks Bobadil won't win."

Barnes accordingly sauntered towards the stables and quickly came across a sharp-looking young man, who, from his garb, was apparently the ostler, and

whom he supposed might be the man he was in search of.

"Fine morning, my lad," he said, by way of entering into conversation.

"Yes, sir," assented the man, "we are having a rare fine autumn."

"Been long here?" said Barnes, "you belong to the place, no doubt."

"No, I don't," rejoined the man, "I come from about thirty mile off, but I've been ostler at the "Wrexford Arms" for nigh two years now."

"And like everybody else at Saxham, I suppose you're death on racing."

"Well, I've heard a lot about it since I came here, but afore that I never thought aught about it."

"Anyway, like everybody else," said Barnes, "you think the squire 'll win the big race next week, don't you?"

"So they do be saying," was the reply, "but I never fash my head about such things."

"Don't fash your head?" said Barnes, "why somebody told me that you always had a bet on a big race, and were the only man in Saxham that said Bobadil wouldn't win."

"Me!" said the man, grinning, "why I never had a wager on a horse-race in my life, you must be thinking of old Dick the Raven."

"Ah!" said Barnes. "Dick was the name! Who's he?"

"Oh, he's ostler down at the other place, at the 'Marquis o' Granby,' down in the village a proper old croaker he is, and all; he allays says a horse won't win, jest as if anybody's ill he says they're sure to die; he bets a good bit in his way though, does Dick!"

"Ah, I suppose that is the man the waiter was talking about," said Barnes, mendaciously, and with a careless nod he walked back into the road, and made his way down the hill towards the village, which lay some half-mile below. He soon came to the "Marquis of Granby" and turned into the yard there in search of the misanthropic bookmaker. He was not long before he made out the man he wanted, and this time felt pretty sure he was right in his surmise.

"I've got into the wrong shop," he muttered to himself, "I ought to have come here instead of to the crib at the top of the hill. Well, my man," he continued aloud, "got your money on Bobadil for next Wednesday? everybody in Saxham tells me he's sure to win."

"You're a stranger, Measter," said Dick. "If you weren't you'd know there's a deal more tongue than sense in Saxham."

"But everybody says he's sure to win," continued Barnes.

"An' I tell yer he wunt," returned the Raven, almost savagely, "they're all a pack of fools about

here, they think there never was so 'cute a man as the Squire nor ever was such horses as his."

"Ah, you don't want him to win."

"Nor would you if you'd laid heavily against him, that is, heavily for me."

"I *have* laid heavily against him," said Barnes, slowly and deliberately. "I'm told the Squire's in very weak health."

"I ain't heard of it," replied Dick gruffly.

"Then, my man, all I can say is, that unless some accident happens to either the horse or the Squire before next Wednesday, it's a hundred to one on Bobadil. I'd lay a hundred pounds to a sovereign Bobadil wins?"

"What!" exclaimed Dick, almost breathlessly, whilst his eyes sparkled like a miser's at the sight of gold, "you would lay a hundred pounds to one on Bobadil?"

"Yes," replied Barnes, "and be dev'lish glad to lose it to boot."

"One hundred pounds, it's a lump of money," murmured the Raven.

"It is," said the other with a half sneer, "but there's not much risk of losing it from all I hear; the horse has won a tremendous trial and nothing is likely to happen to him. You tell me the Squire's quite well, therefore there's nothing likely to happen to *him*; it's more likely to be a sovereign in my pocket than anything else."

If Dick was a slow thinker, it was simply because the drowsy atmosphere in which he lived was not calculated to sharpen the intellect and develop rapidity of thought, but he was very far from being a fool, and though he could yet hardly grasp the meaning of Barnes's villainous proposal, still his instinct as a bookmaker told him that he was bound to accept such odds as a hundred to one "on" anything. "I'll take that bet, Measter," he observed at length; "if you'll just write down your name and address, I'll send you the pound right enough if you win it. You're a Lun'nun gentleman I reckon, not likely you live in these parts? I don't hold much to betting with them I don't know but I suppose you're right 'nough? But I'll ask you just to give me your name and address."

Barnes hesitated a minute or two; he would much rather have not given either his name or his address, but he had gone too far to recede. If he refused, Dick's suspicions would be aroused, and he would doubt his, Barnes's, solvency; on the other hand, to give Dick the hundred pounds as a guarantee of good faith would probably result in the ostler absconding with it.

"All right," he observed, and taking his betting book from his pocket, he scribbled down his address, tore out the leaf and handed it to Dick.

"Thank you, sir," replied the ostler, "I must trouble you for one thing more," and as he spoke he

produced a large, greasy well-used pocket-book, and a stump of black-lead pencil, and proceeded to enter the bet that Barnes had just laid at the bottom of several similar transactions made chiefly in crowns and half-sovereigns.

"Now, Measter," he said, when he had finished, "if you'll just sign your name to it, that'll be all right."

Barnes rather winced as he signed the bet, he knew he was putting his precious skin in some jeopardy by so doing, but he knew it was absurd to suppose that he would not have to run some risk in making Bobadil safe, as he preferred to term it to himself. To say that he had just deliberately offered a man a hundred pounds to commit a base and cowardly murder was an ugly way of putting it, and yet he was not certain that Dick had taken in quite what he was expected to do for that hundred pounds under the guise of a bet.

"I shall be here all to-morrow," he said at last, "and shall perhaps see you again."

"I'm mostly about the yard in the afternoon," replied Dick, "I take the thing a bit easy on Sunday mornings."

"Well, there's half-a-crown to wet your whistle, anyhow," said Barnes, "and if I don't see you again, good-bye, but I daresay I shall."

CHAPTER XIII.

"JENNY SAYS NO."

THE party at the Grange had pretty well all dispersed on the Friday, and the few who had lingered till the Saturday morning were conscious of much depression in the atmosphere of the house. The engagement of the cousins, and the Squire's decision concerning it were naturally at once made known to Mrs. Wrexford and Jenny. If Rob Gauntlett had thought his uncle's terms hard, his fiancée went further, and pronounced them tyrannical; three years at eighteen appears almost interminable, and further that she should be prohibited from even seeing Rob for all that time, seemed to the girl harsh, arbitrary and unkind.

"It's not like papa," she cried, "I thought he loved me and was fond of Rob, now I don't believe he cares for me. I know Rob's been wild and foolish, but hasn't he promised Papa he won't do so any more, and why can't he take his word? Whatever he is, Rob's no liar."

It was in vain her mother and sister pointed out that Rob was not forbidden the house for anything like three years, that her father had said pointedly that his sentence of banishment rested entirely with Rob himself; that if he only kept to his

promise, she might be quite sure the Squire would rescind his veto, in six or seven months, and as for the rest they were both young, three years would soon slip away and they could afford to wait.

"If I might only see him," cried the girl, "I wouldn't mind; it's making us both miserable, just for nothing and quite enough to make him go to the bad."

"He must care very little for you if he does," said Jenny sharply, "but I honestly don't think he will."

"Oh, it's all very well for you to talk," replied her sister, "but I wonder how you'd like it yourself?"

"Don't be foolish," retorted Jenny, "it'll be time enough to talk about that when the time comes."

"It was just the loveliest week I ever had," pouted the petted girl, "and there, just at the end of it, Papa goes and spoils everything."

The moralists tell us there is much pleasure to be derived from conscientiously doing our duty, I can only say that a man may be doing his duty to the best of his judgment and feel not only very uncomfortable about it himself, but be equally aware that he is making things unpleasant for those immediately around him. This was the Squire's case. He knew that he was quite right in insisting that his daughter's engagement to her cousin should be postponed until Rob had turned over a new leaf and given up gambling. He knew he was right, and his view would have been upheld by any sensible person in prohibiting all intercourse between the

young couple, until Rob should have given, at all events, some earnest of his good resolutions, and yet he was quite conscious that his pet daughter resented his interference, and not only that, but her mother and sister, though admitting the justice of his decision, were sympathising with the martyr. Jim Lyster was quite right in saying that when the head of the family was put out the rest of the household knew it.

Tom Wrexford was very fond of his wife and children, and the little jars common enough between parents and their children were almost unknown at the Grange, and now for the first time since his wedding-day the Squire was conscious that he and his wife were not in accord. Mrs. Wrexford thought that Rob's promise ought to have been deemed sufficient, that he might still have been allowed to visit the Grange, and that if by the end of six months he had got rid of his race-horses and was found to abstain from betting, he ought to be considered sufficiently purged of his evil courses. The Squire on the contrary thought that Rob would show much more resolution if he continued to race in a modest way, but rigidly abstained from betting.

Henry Curtice, it may be remembered, had lingered behind after the other guests had departed and, as may be supposed, was speedily made aware of what had taken place. He was not surprised, having for some time thought such a thing might

happen, nor had he anything but kindly feeling towards the lovers. Still, he naturally took the Squire's side when talking the thing over with his aunt or Jenny, and could not be made to see anything hard in his uncle's stipulations ; he expressed no doubt of Rob's good resolutions, but, as he said, the Squire could scarcely be blamed if he desired some proof of Rob's reformation before consenting to the marriage ; meanwhile this gave him rather the opportunity he desired. Miss Rose, after the manner of young ladies whose love affairs have gone askew, at once assumed invalid airs, and as Mrs. Wrexford thought it necessary to stay at home and pet her, Curtice and Jenny were thrown a good bit together. He had contemplated leaving the Grange on Monday, but when the Squire announced his intention of leaving Saxham by the very first train on Wednesday morning for London, and from thence running down to Newmarket to see the Cæsarewitch, Henry postponed his departure and said that he would wait and go up with his uncle. During the last two days he flattered himself that he had made some way with his cousin, and he had in some wise, insomuch as Jenny had just awoke to what his persistent attentions were tending ; it may be doubted whether even now she would have guessed the truth if her eyes had not been opened by a gibe which Rose, in her petulance, threw at her. With two more clear days at his disposal, Curtice thought

he might venture to speak, and he was very anxious that this matter should be arranged before he left; if he had commenced his courtship in somewhat cold-blooded fashion, regarding a wife more as a necessary appendage to his career than anything else, and deeming that Jenny would make him a very suitable one, to do him justice, he was quite in earnest now. The girl's sweet temper, her many fine qualities, to say nothing of the admiration with which she was greeted, had all grown upon him; he had always liked her as a cousin, but he had never regarded her in the light of a wife till quite lately. He was not passionately in love with her, 'twas not in the man's nature to be that, but a firm, steadfast affection for her was rapidly growing up, which is perhaps after all a better guarantee for future happiness than a stronger and more passionate devotion.

But in spite of her sister's warning Jenny could still scarcely believe that Henry Curtice really contemplated asking her to be his wife. However, any doubts on that subject were dispelled on the last day of his visit, for, catching her alone in the drawing-room, he gently asked her the question, telling her that he was really much attached to her, and that if she would only trust herself to him he would do his best to make her happy. Rather a prosaic proposal, no doubt, but Jenny was too sensible a girl to think the worse of it for that. She answered no more than the truth when she said:

"We have been cousins too long, Henry, for me ever to think of you in that way, and you must forgive my saying so, but I really don't think that you're the least in love with me. I'm very proud that you should have asked me to be your wife. Everybody prophesies a successful career for you, and I'm sure that in a very few years you will be a husband whom any woman might be proud of."

"What has our being cousins got to do with it? I cannot see that that is an objection. Look at Rose and Rob Gauntlett, for instance."

"Ah, yes," replied the girl, "but there are cousins and cousins. They have been half in love with each other almost since they were children, as anybody except papa must have seen. You and I have always been like brother and sister, and brother and sister must be to the end. Henry, believe me, it is best so."

"I've asked you too abruptly," he said, at length. "I should have given you more time. It was foolish of me. I might have known a girl's heart was not won so easily, let me speak to you about this later on, when you will be, at all events, convinced that I know my own mind. I tell you, Jenny, I am very earnest in this thing, and shall not give up all hope simply from what has passed between us to-day."

"It will be all the same," replied the girl gravely. "A true cousin to you, from a sisterly point of view, ever; more I can never be."

"I am sadly disappointed," was his reply. "You

need not fear I will give you any annoyance, but it's not in my nature to give up all hope of anything I've set my heart on." And with these words he got up and quietly left the room.

Rob Gauntlett had gone down to Newmarket with two or three of his most intimate friends on the Monday night. He was, as may be supposed, in a state of great excitement, accustomed though he was to bet high. He was not only striving to win a very large stake over the coming race, but he felt also that it probably would have a considerable effect on his engagement. Should he be successful his winnings would go far to straighten his affairs, and when he had once convinced his uncle that he meant to stand steadfastly by his resolve, and the question of settlements necessitated a disclosure of his affairs, it would certainly weigh in his favour if the Squire should find him not so deeply involved as he probably anticipated. He was highly delighted on the Tuesday morning to receive a note from his uncle, announcing briefly that he had changed his mind, and should be down at Newmarket next day in time to see the big race. At Saxham the Squire had stated positively that he should not leave home, but Rob's engagement had placed the Squire slightly at variance with his family, and as that worried him a good deal, it occurred to him that he could not do better than go away for a few days till things had quieted down, and a run up to Newmarket

to see the Cæsarewitch made a very plausible excuse.

Old Martin and his charges had duly arrived, and the crafty old trainer expressed great confidence in Bobadil, and for a man chary of his words as Martin was, this came with considerable weight; moreover, the stable won a small race with another horse on the first day of the meeting which, as it always does, further strengthened the position of the favourite. The Plutarch party were pretty confident, though their horse had a much smaller following than Bobadil. Like the latter, he was a horse with very moderate credentials, and, as is often the case in large handicaps, the capabilities of the two favourites had to be taken entirely on trust and not by any record of their previous performances. The pride of place, in such cases, resolves itself into which carries the greatest weight of money. Gauntlett was one of the "plungers," and, as he told all his friends that his horse had won a tremendous trial, these gentlemen were determined not to be out "of a good thing," and backed it with all their wonted freedom. No first favourite, on the eve of a big race, was ever firmer than Bobadil.

"How are you, Gauntlett?" said Jim Lyster, as he came across Rob in the betting-ring. "No need to enquire about Bobadil. The market's a sure guarantee that he's in the best of health."

"Yes," replied Gauntlett, "win or lose, I think

you will have a rare good run for your money, and, what do you think? I got a letter this morning from my uncle, and he's coming down to-morrow to see it. I'm awfully pleased. At Saxham he couldn't be persuaded to hear of it."

"Of course he ought to be here," replied Lyster, "running in his name and all. Why he ought to lead in the winner, and when they see the Squire at Bobadil's head they'll give him a rattling cheer, you bet. There's not a better known man on the heath than your uncle."

"By Jove! I never thought of that. If it comes off, of course he must. This time to-morrow and I hope we shall have won our money, and my commissioner has returned a very fair average price too."

"Very good of you to let me stand that pony," replied Lyster. "I shall be sadly disappointed if it does not come off, for I've got a most covetous eye on a hunter, and my buying him depends upon Bobadil."

At this moment a telegraph boy rushed past yelling, "Barnes, Barnes," at the top of his voice.

"Don't break your voice, young 'un," said a book-maker who was standing by, "he's not here, he hasn't been seen all the morning."

Horace Barnes was well-known to both men, but neither of them took much heed at the time of his being absent from the scene of his professional avocations; but circumstances were destined, ere long, to recall the fact vividly to their recollection

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CÆSAREWITCH

THE day of the great race had come at last, and the morning air was alive with rumours. It is said that there had never been so much money betted over the Cæsareshitch before, and there could be no doubt that the wagering had been of an unprecedentedly heavy description. There was no change to be recorded in the market status of the leading favourites, and both Plutarch and Bobadil had passed a good night; it was rumoured that the field would be large, the owners of some few horses who had not been expected to run having at the last moment resolved to take their chance. The Newmarket of those days was by no means so crowded as it is now, and even at the present time, it is curious to note how the size of the heath dwarfs the throng collected to witness a big race. Nowhere does a crowd lose the majesty of numbers in the same manner as it does at Newmarket; numerous though they may be, seen from afar off a crowd on the heath is apt to look merely as if a few people had got together to witness something of interest.

Most of the people connected with our story were assembled in front of the Rooms before racing commenced, engaged in betting, comparing books, or for the hundredth time, perhaps, discussing the

chances of the competitors in the Cæsarewitch. Wherever Mr. Barnes might have been yesterday, he was conspicuously to the fore this morning, and had still apparently plenty of money to lay out on the big handicap. Barnes was a rather noisy and talkative member of the fraternity, which made his presence or absence in the ring as a rule more noticeable than those of his brethren; as a body, book-makers confine their speech pretty much to business, but Barnes was notoriously given to a good deal of facetiousness, in addition to conversation; not that he shewed much of either this morning. Shelton, on the contrary, was of a morose and taciturn disposition; his operations, moreover, were conducted on a smaller scale than the other's; he had perhaps not so much capital, or—what was still more probable—was more cautious and prudent in his speculations. Barnes was a dashing bettor, rendered more conspicuous also by the swagger that attended his transactions. It is necessary to mention this circumstance, as it made just this difference—for, as Shelton's absence from an important race-meeting would very likely be overlooked, that of Barnes would be pretty sure to be noticed.

The opening events attract but little attention, all excitement, and even wagering, seem to have concentrated themselves on the big handicap, and even Jim Lyster, who piques himself on never getting excited about anything, is conscious of a

tingling in the pulses which no horse-race had ever produced before. He knows nothing whatever of Rob's engagement, nor does he know more than the world generally of Rob's difficulties, but on the Turf a large speculator soon obtains notoriety, and how the battle goes with him is generally well known. Jim is quite aware that Gauntlett's losses must have been very heavy during his brief career, and has taken into his head that this is a last throw for fortune.

The overture's got through at last, the preliminary events disposed of, and the *pièce de resistance* comes on the board; the numbers for the Cæsarewitch go up; the names of the jockeys destined to ride the several competitors are eagerly scanned, and the process of "weighing out" has commenced.

"I haven't seen the Squire," remarked Lyster; "he is here, of course?"

"I don't know," replied Gauntlett; "it's a very odd thing, but I haven't seen him either; it's easy to miss coming across a man here, but still one does see everybody in the bird-cage before a big race."

"Yes," returned Jim, "an old hand like your uncle, I should think, would be quite certain to turn up here."

"Well, he may yet. I can't understand it, the time's getting on, and if he's not pretty quick he will miss the race after all—it's very annoying. I'm not superstitious, but I feel somehow I shall have no luck if he's not here to see."

"It is disappointing," said Jim. "Is he given to changing his mind at the last moment?"

"Not at all," said Gauntlett, who was really much put out at his uncle's absence, "there never was a man more punctual nor more punctilious about keeping appointments. If Uncle Tom said he would meet you anywhere, you might always count upon him."

"Missed his train, perhaps," suggested Lyster.

"It may be," said Rob, "or perhaps they had an accident on the line, trains do break down at times, if it had been between this and London, no doubt we should have heard of it. That line from Saxham is one of the worst in England. Come and have a look at Bobadil," and the pair made their way to where a little knot was congregated round a neat-looking brown horse that looked trained to the hour.

"He looks very fit, Martin, and does you credit," remarked Lyster; "I had no idea he was such a small horse."

"Yes, he's not a big 'un, sir," replied the trainer, "but what there is of him is good every bit of it, I can't make him an ounce better; if he's beat to-day, it will be because he's met one too good for him, but I don't think he will."

Gauntlett then proposed they should have a look at Plutarch, who was surrounded by a little band of admirers at some slight distance; he was a considerably bigger horse than his rival and was also a year older, but he certainly lacked the quality exhibited

by the little brown. Still the way he was backed, and the confidence displayed by the clever division connected with him, all pointed to his proving one of Bobadil's most dangerous antagonists.

"There," said Gauntlett, "old Martin's not afraid, but says that's the only one that might possibly upset his calculations."

"I'll be bound he won't, but here comes your jockey and they're going to saddle Bobadil," and as he spoke, a wiry little mannikin, in an amber jacket with black sleeves, made his way with his saddle on his arm to Bobadil's side. "Little chance of the Squire turning up now," continued Lyster, "if he missed you he'd have been sure to have found the horse, he would certainly want to have a look at him before the flag fell."

And now the horses commence to make their way in twos and threes towards the starting-post on the Beacon course. The fierce tumult of the ring gradually dies away, and "backers and fielders" all seek some point of vantage from which to see the race; the partisans of the two favourites are respectively brim full of confidence to the very last, and though Bobadil is two or three points the better favourite, yet the supporters of Plutarch's white jacket believe as steadfastly in their champion as the followers of the amber and black sleeves.

After two or three breaks away the competitors, twenty-six in number, are despatched to a very fair start, a lightly-weighted old horse hardly mentioned

in the betting, and whose running at all was quite an eleventh-hour surprise, is the first to show clear, and making the most of his small impost, brings the field along at a good pace. As they go through Choke Jade, one begins to see the horses clearly; Plutarch's white jacket is conspicuous in the van, but the amber and black sleeves of the favourite are by no means prominent.

"Bobadil's outpaced already," exclaimed Gauntlett, as a feeling of impending disaster took possession of him.

"Nonsense," replied Lyster, "they've a long way to come yet, and the first through the gap has seldom much to say at the finish."

"Well, that black and white jacket leads them through the gap," continued Gauntlett; "what the deuce is it? Twenty-two; the number only went up at the last moment."

"Why, that's old Queen Bee," returned Jim, "a good mare she was too. I thought her day had passed; she's giving them a taste of her old speed though this afternoon."

"Plutarch's going strong," muttered Gauntlett, excitedly, "and even if Bobadil ever does catch him he'll find him a stiff nut to crack."

Could Gauntlett have heard old Martin's comment in the trainers' stand, he would have derived much consolation. "Why yours is out of it already, Isaac," cried one of his professional brethren.

"Never fear," was the old man's rejoinder, "mine hasn't begun yet, they'll find him going just the same pace when most of them are standing still."

"Plutarch beats you for a hundred," cried another of the fraternity, but old Martin only shook his head, that was not the sort of way he was wont to back horses.

And now the plot thickens, they have travelled a good half-way, and are close on the commencement of the Rowley Mile, the pace quickens, and old Queen Bee, still leading, looks like galloping her field to a standstill. The tailing begins and at last the ominous silence, which has possessed the backers of Bobadil since the fall of the flag, is broken. Shrill above the murmur of brief comments on the running comes the cry of one of his lynx-eyed supporters, "What price Bobadil?" and it is quickly apparent to every one that the amber jacket is threading its way to the front. As old Martin had said, his horse was a thorough stayer and bad to get rid of. As they near the Bushes old Queen Bee, having shot her bolt, collapses, and a black jacket is left temporarily in command, only to be immediately challenged by Plutarch, who in a couple of strides assumes the lead. In the meantime Bobadil has been rapidly catching his horses, or perhaps, to speak more accurately, his horses have been coming back to him.

Half-way up the hill, the rider of Plutarch looks

round, and is evidently uneasy at finding the amber jacket closing on him. The air has rung with the shouts of "Plutarch wins," the last few seconds, now for the first time comes a counter cheer from the partisans of Gauntlett's horse, and from hundreds of throats comes the shout of "Bobadil, Bobadil wins." The jockey of Plutarch sits down and commences to ride his horse in earnest, for an instant he forges ahead, but by this time Bobadil's jockey is also hard upon his horse, and the little brown sticks to his antagonist like a leech. It is a desperate race home, but inch by inch Bobadil wears his antagonist down, and gradually gets his nose in front and, running gamest of the game, after a tremendous finish, gains the verdict by a neck.

Numerous were the congratulations showered upon Rob Gauntlett at his victory; he was a popular man, and had had a run of persistent bad luck, and even the bookmakers, though they suffered by it, did not grudge his at last having a turn in his favour. He had lost plenty of money amongst them and had, in their parlance, always taken his punishment like a man. The gentlemen generally were on good terms with themselves, for they had as a rule backed this good thing of Rob Gauntlett's and consequently won their money. The jockey had weighed in, the "all right" had been pronounced, and men dispersed in search of luncheon, when an ominous whisper ran through the enclosure to the

effect that there was an objection. Men who had mentally counted their gains changed countenance.

An objection? good Heavens! on what grounds? Nobody knew, nobody could say, whether the weight was wrong, whether there was complaint of cross, jostle, or foul riding. Nobody knew, but the rumour gathered strength with every minute, and that an objection had been lodged, on the part of the second horse, was now stated most positively.

Those who had best seen the finish of the race, were those most surprised. "On what grounds are they going?" they asked. "Plutarch was never in the least interfered with, the winner ran straight as a gun-barrel. Never was a race more fairly won." The rider of the second horse, when it's a close thing, is generally accused of having thrown the race away. In this case, even the backers of Plutarch admitted that their jockey could have done no more, and that there was no bumping at the finish. It so happened Gauntlett and Lyster had gone to lunch with some friends, having a break rather down the course, and the consequence was that old Martin, who was searching everywhere for his employer, as well as were two or three other people, were unable to find him.

At last the rumour took definite shape, and it was whispered about that the horse was wrongly nominated. At length having finished a somewhat hilarious lunch, Gauntlett made his way back to the

stand with a view of telegraphing Bobadil's victory to his *fiancée*. As he was leaving the telegraph office he came across Charley Rooke, who said at once :

“This objection's all rubbish of course, Gauntlett?”

“Objection!” exclaimed Rob. “This is the first I've heard of it. What on earth can they object to? If ever a race was won fair and square it's to-day's Cæsarewitch.”

“Don't know, I'm sure,” said Rooke. “Something wrong in his nomination, I'm told.”

“What nonsense!” rejoined Gauntlett. “He ran in my uncle's name, with his knowledge and consent, and there's no reason he shouldn't; as for the horse, he's *bonâ fide* my property, and has been for the last two months and more.”

“Well, I'm sure I hope it's all right,” replied Rooke. “I'm not speaking on account of my own little win, although that would come in handy, but I'm afraid it will make a serious difference to you, as you told us at Saxham you'd backed it to win a good stake.”

“By Jove! You're right, it will. A serious difference in more ways than one. Wrong nomination. I can't think what on earth they're going on. I must be off to see about this.”

On reaching the weighing-room he found a little knot gathered round the door, and evidently considerable excitement prevailed. One of the first persons he saw was old Isaac Martin, and the

trainer at once came across to him with a very serious face.

"I've been looking for you everywhere, sir, and sending after you in all directions. Have you heard there's an objection lodged against Bobadil?"

"Yes; some nonsense about wrong nomination. I've just come round to see about it."

"It's not exactly that," said the trainer gravely, "and I sincerely trust there are no better grounds for it than that would be."

"Then what the devil is it?" said Rob impetuously. "They can't surely accuse Rice of unfair riding?"

"No, sir, the objection is laid on account of the death of the nominator previous to the race."

"What! the death of my uncle?" exclaimed Gauntlett. "Why, I had a letter from him only yesterday to say he'd be here to-day to see Bobadil win."

"Have you seen him, sir?" asked the trainer quickly.

"Well, no, I've not, but he may have missed his train or a hundred things, or, for the matter of that, be on the Heath at this very moment. Dead! It's absurd. Why, Mr. Lyster and I were staying at Saxham all last week, and my uncle was never in better health or spirits. We only left there last Friday."

"Well, sir," said Martin, "that's the objection made, and I can only sincerely trust it isn't true. The stewards had no choice except to receive it, but whether it's true or false can only be a question of

two or three hours. You will see the stewards, sir?"

"At once," replied Gauntlett.

One of these high officials no sooner saw him than, with the remark, "I sincerely trust, Mr. Gauntlett, that there's no truth in this," handed him a curt copy of the objection.

"Mr. Thomas Wrexford's br. colt, Bobadil, by Munchausen, out of Bounce, is hereby objected to, for the Cæsarewitch, on the ground of the death of his nominator.

"JONAS GRUEBY."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MURDER.

WE must now go back twenty-four hours in the course of this narrative, and see what took place at the Grange on the Tuesday, the day preceding the decision of the Cæsarewitch. As we know, it had been arranged that Henry Curtice and his uncle should start early the next morning for town; on the Tuesday morning Curtice had asked Jenny to be his wife and been courteously, though firmly, refused. Circumstances threw constraint over the whole party when they met at lunch, and that meal over, they went their several ways and got through a somewhat tedious afternoon as each of them best could. Curtice was the first to appear in the drawing-room before dinner, and was almost immediately followed by Mrs. Wrexford, who at once said:

“It’s very odd, Henry, but I don’t know what’s become of your uncle. I don’t know where he’s been the whole afternoon—down at the paddocks most likely. Still, it’s very strange he’s not back by this. He’s usually so punctual.”

“Something’s detained him, I suppose,” said Curtice. “He can’t be looking at the young things now. It’s been too dark to see them for the last two hours, but he and Lightfoot sometimes have a lot to talk over.”

Jenny and her sister now made their appearance and both expressed surprise upon hearing their father had not come in. A few minutes later the butler came into the room to inquire what had best be done about dinner. His master had not come in yet. Should he give orders that the dinner was to be put back half an hour? The half hour dragged its length away and still there were no tidings of the Squire. He was a man of very regular and punctual habits, who, if he’d been about to do anything likely to delay his return, would have been pretty certain to have mentioned it. None of the household had seen him since luncheon, nor could anyone say, positively, in what direction he had gone; the footman had seen him go out of the front door between three and four o’clock, and that was all that was known about him.

“I should think, Aunt, it would be best to send down to Lightfoot’s and inquire if he’s been there.”

“Something must have happened,” exclaimed Mrs. Wrexford, vainly endeavouring to conceal her agitation. “Pray send at once, Henry.” A feeling of apprehension rapidly stole over the whole party. Something must have happened, or the master of Saxham would surely have returned to his own house by this time. Even Curtice began to feel uneasy, and when the messenger returned from the paddocks with the intelligence that the Squire had spent some time there, but had left Lightfoot’s house a little before six to walk back to the Grange, Henry promptly decided that they must turn out and search the park at once.

Soothing his aunt and cousins as he best could and impressing upon them that they could render no help, that their fears, after all, were probably groundless, and that while they were all out hunting for him in the park, his uncle would most likely turn up, Curtice got together all the men-servants, gathered the contingents belonging to the stables and garden, and having armed them with all the lanterns he could lay hands on, started on his quest. He did not know exactly what to think himself, but was certainly a great deal more anxious about his uncle than he had just professed to be. Although there was not the slightest reason to suspect the Squire of any disposition to either, yet heart disease and apoplexy do terminate men’s careers both suddenly and un-

expectedly. Still, if anything of that nature had befallen him, it was very odd that the messenger previously despatched had not come across him. There was no regular pathway leading to the paddocks, but, in walking across the park towards them from the Grange, it was not likely anyone would deviate much from the direct line. Curtice spread out his men like a line of skirmishers, and before they had got quite half-way, a cry of horror rang through the air, which not only arrested the line, but brought the whole band speedily to the spot from whence the cry proceeded. Curtice himself walking directly towards the paddocks, had spread out his followers on either hand. Some fifty yards to his right was a small and thick clump of trees, and one of the grooms, in whose way it lay, had no sooner entered it than he caught sight of a confused heap, which he felt sure was the figure of a man. He flashed his lantern upon it, and at once recognised his master, with his face looking up to Heaven, bathed in blood and stone dead. Curtice and the rest were speedily on the spot, but the dead man's appearance left no doubt that a most dastardly deed had been committed, and that poor Tom Wrexford had been done to death in his own park, little more than a quarter of a mile from his own front door. Who was the murderer, and what had led him to commit the crime, none of them could tell. It could hardly be a case of robbery,

though Curtice, in a hasty examination of the body ascertained that the dead man's watch was gone, and, in all probability, whatever other valuables he might have had about him. His clothes were but slightly in disorder, and, as far as Curtice could judge, there could have been but little struggle between Wrexford and his destroyers; he had apparently been struck down and rendered *hors de combat* by the very first blow. As he'd been struck more than once, it was already pretty obvious that murder as well as robbery had been the intention. However, at the present moment Curtice was too absorbed in thinking how he was to break the awful tidings to the women at the Grange to think much of anything else. Tom Wrexford was dead; his wife and daughters had to be told it, and how he had died, and on him, Henry Curtice, devolved the terrible duty of telling the story. Slowly, at his bidding, the men raised their dead master from his bloodstained couch and bore him towards the Grange. Curtice himself walked at the head of the procession, and when they neared the house softly told the bearers to stop while he went forward on his mournful errand. Those he had left behind him were by this time wound up to an extreme state of nervous terror. No sooner was his step heard in the hall than Mrs. Wrexford rushed out of the drawing-room, followed by her daughters.

"Something terrible has happened," she exclaimed,

"I can see it in your face; in pity's sake let me know the worst at once. Not dead?" she continued, dropping her voice almost to a whisper, "not dead, surely not dead! Badly hurt?—yes. Oh, my poor darling, where is he?"

Curtice bowed his head in silence, while his lips literally refused to speak.

"Tell us the truth, Henry," said Jenny, turning white to her very lips, "we must know it sooner or later, and, believe me, it's better we should know it at once."

"Dead!" he murmured in a low tone.

"God help us!" cried Jenny, as her mother fell back into her arms and her sister burst into a torrent of passionate tears.

Whatever her own feelings might be, the girl knew she had to master them, had she not those other two to soothe and take care of? She had no time to indulge her own grief at present. Her mother and sister were always accustomed to lean upon Jenny whenever any of the lesser evils of life overtook them, and nothing was more natural than that they should look to her in the first great trouble which had befallen them, and to Jenny it seemed quite natural it should be so. She was devotedly attached to her father, and would feel his death not a bit the less because her moan was not so loud as that of the others; that she must be her mother's stay in this time of sorrow she recognised

at once, and that was as much as she did recognise. At present she was too dazed to think of anything else. Even Henry Curtice, cool and practical man of the world as he was, for the moment was too stunned to think of what steps it behoved him to take on the part of the widow and her daughters. The village doctor had been already sent for, but his services would be of no avail; the police must be communicated with, and every effort made to bring the murderer to justice. To-morrow morning the news would be all over the village, and the chances were there would be paragraphs in most of the evening papers. Of the consequences of the Squire's death to any but his widow and children Curtice never gave a thought. His mind was concentrated during that long night chiefly on the one thing, the perpetrator of the crime must be hunted down; and to arrive at that it would be necessary in the first instance to look for the motive that prompted the deed.

Curtice had not a high opinion of the country police, he would telegraph to Scotland Yard the first thing in the morning and ask for help; but he registered a vow to himself that night, and swore he would never rest until he had brought his uncle's murderer to justice, and it was characteristic of the man, he relied upon himself chiefly to accomplish this end. It had been too dark to thoroughly examine the scene of the Squire's death as yet, but

as soon as it was light he determined upon a close investigation of the spot. Many a criminal has found his neck eventually in the noose from some slip made in commission of his crime, then again the murderer had taken his victim's watch, and, as Curtice knew, no more damning piece of testimony could he have been rash enough to seize upon.

There was little sleep at the Grange that night, and soon after daybreak Curtice, accompanied by the groom who discovered his master, and Wilkinson, the under-keeper, proceeded to the little clump of trees—the scene of the tragedy. The keeper bent his eyes on the ground, and at once commenced to examine not only the clump of trees, but its vicinity, with the close attention common to men of his craft when anything unusual attracts their attention; gradually he strayed some little distance from the place towards the direct line leading from the Grange to the paddocks. Curtice, who was carefully scanning every inch of the ground beneath the trees, had paid no attention to Wilkinson's movements, but the man now suddenly raised his head as one who had solved a point entirely to his satisfaction, and, coming back quickly to the trees, said, "Beg pardon, Mr. Henry, but they didn't kill the Squire here."

"What do you mean?" enquired Curtice; "you weren't out with us last night. Cooper and I both saw him lying here dead."

"This be the very spot," said the groom, pointing with his finger.

"He was brought here," continued Wilkinson, taking no notice of the groom's remark; "if you come over there, Mr. Henry, you can see the foot-marks where the struggle took place; I should say there wasn't much of a fight, the poor master was evidently taken by surprise, still you can see the blood upon the grass, and, what's more, there lies his walking-stick still. He was struck down there, and they carried **him** here."

"What makes you say 'they'?" enquired Curtice.

"Well, sir, I'll tell you," rejoined the keeper. "I think there was two in it for this reason, if there had been only one, he'd have most likely *dragged* the poor master here, and that would have left marks easy to follow; no, he was carried, and if you look close, you'll see there's traces of two different footsteps."

"Show me," said Curtice, and under the guidance of Wilkinson's practised eye, he at once discerned the tracks which the keeper had discovered, and then it suddenly flashed across him that the criminals must have had accurate knowledge of the Squire's habits, to have selected the time and place they did.

But closely though they searched in all directions there was no further clue found that might lead to the detection of the murderers; what the motive could have been further than mere robbery, Curtice

was at a loss to conjecture, and his impression was that the murder had been an unpremeditated sequel to the robbery, consequent on the Squire having recognised his assailants. Curtice came to the conclusion that the murderers, if not actually belonging to the village, were at all events well known in Saxham.

In London, on Wednesday evening, the news of the objection to Bobadil's Cæsarewitch, followed as it was by a brief paragraph in the special edition of the evening papers, containing the news of Tom Wrexford's murder, caused great excitement among the clubs and in racing circles. The dead man had been a figure so well known on the turf and had been seen at Doncaster not a month ago in the best of health and spirits, that his untimely end itself would have caused no little stir, but taken in conjunction with the remarkable objection arising from it, not only the turf world, but the club smoking-rooms literally rang with it that night; such an extraordinary case had never been heard of, and men asked each other how was it the owner of Plutarch came by such early knowledge of the Squire's sudden death? Those who had been down at Newmarket to see the race, said that Gauntlett was in complete ignorance of the catastrophe, and moreover, that Wrexford himself had been expected to be present to see the colt he had named win; report said there would be an awful settling, that

Gauntlett was utterly ruined, and that two or three of his immediate friends would be very hard put to it indeed to meet their liabilities on Monday. At the rooms at Newmarket that same night it was whispered about that the Saxham murder, as it was already termed, had been a most singular piece of luck for the small and very astute coterie connected with Plutarch, that they had won an immense sum, as, the objection being undoubtedly fatal, Bobadil must be of course disqualified, and then racing men began to reflect dimly that it was a curious coincidence that a terrible crime should have happened so opportunely for a little knot of unscrupulous bookmakers. Mr. Barnes and his companions, indeed, received very scanty congratulations on their good fortune; they were not, indeed, a popular clique with their brethren, and certainly could hardly expect to be felicitated on a victory obtained at the price of a thorough good sportman's life. It had not as yet suggested itself to Henry Curtice down in the country to connect his uncle's fate with what had happened at Newmarket; although he had some superficial knowledge of turf matters, he had no great knowledge of them, and in his horror at the terrible death that had come to his uncle, he would have completely forgotten all about Bobadil but for the bitter mockery of that telegram which Rob, in the first flush of his triumph, had sent to his *fiancée*, and which Jenny had silently handed

him in the course of the afternoon. The morning papers on the Wednesday had never been even opened, and even had he looked at them they would of course told him nothing about the race. At present, he was concentrating all his attention on the village of Saxham, and stealthily directing enquiries as to whether there was anyone in the place either known to have a grudge against the Squire or to be in bitter need of money.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ROSE DENOUNCES THE MURDERER.”

FOR a minute or two after reading the copy of the objection, Rob Gauntlett stood motionless. A wrong nomination he had laughed at, but the idea of his uncle's death had never occurred to him till Martin had mentioned it just previously, and even then he had believed it to be a mistake of the trainer's. Now it flashed across him that it was only too likely to be true; his uncle after promising to be there to see the horse win had failed to put in an appearance. What could have happened? What fatal mischance could have stricken down the man he had left hale and hearty not a week before? It was not likely the owner of Plutarch would have made such an objection lightly, he must have had strong grounds on which to lodge such a protest—a protest which, unless true, an hour or two must scatter to the winds. Good Heavens! to think

that his uncle, who had been a second father to him almost from his boyhood, should be gone, that he should never clasp his hand again, that he should never more hear his voice, and then he thought of Saxham and all the woe and desolation that must be spread through the dear old Grange. He could picture his aunt bowed to the earth with her sorrow, while Jenny, with bloodless cheeks, strove in vain to comfort her, then he thought of his sweet little *fiancée* and pictured her to himself as crushed and prostrate beneath the first terrible grief of her young life; every thought of the race had gone completely out of his head; one thing only was clear to him, he must get back to Saxham as quickly as possible and help them all to bear this affliction as best he could. He walked out of the weighing-room like a man in a dream, and replied to the old trainer's mute interrogatory by so stern a "Don't speak to me," that Martin shrank back abashed. As he pushed his way through the crowd, more than one racing man pressed forward to ask him the truth about the objection, but as their eyes encountered the hard set, troubled face, the words died away upon their lips and they refrained from addressing him. Hailing the first fly he could catch, he drove back to the town, called for a moment at his lodgings to tell his servant to follow at once to Saxham with his things, and then ordered the fly-man to proceed to the railway station.

On arriving in London he found that the last train for Saxham had gone, and it was impossible for him to reach the Grange till next morning. In the evening papers he read the brief announcement of his uncle's murder; although he had felt it was hoping against hope, he had still clung to the idea that there might be some mistake, but as he read that fatal paragraph, he knew it was all over, and when next he gazed upon his uncle's face, it would be still in death. By the first train in the morning he was on his way, everybody knew him down that line—he had no need to ask questions, he could see in their faces that it was true; the railway servants were more marked than ever in their attentions, and although their sympathy was silently expressed, yet it was evident that deep regret for him who was gone, and great compassion for those who were left, filled their minds. He spoke to no one till the trap that he had chartered at the station to carry him over to Saxham turned in at the park gates, then he ordered the driver to stop, and getting out of the carriage, asked Mrs. Wilkinson if her husband was at home; the woman answered him with a sob, and saying that she would call him, went back into the house. She had been a servant up at the Grange before she married, and like most of their dependents was sincerely attached to the family, and inexpressibly shocked at the Squire's death and the manner of it. A few

minutes and the keeper appeared. Gauntlett gave him a short nod and then said briefly :

"Tell me all about it, Wilkinson, as quickly as you can."

The keeper at once recounted how the Squire had been first missed, how they had then sent down to Lightfoot's house in quest of him, how the park had been searched, and how in that thick clump of trees, which lay half way between the Grange and Paddocks, the Squire had been found dead, and with such marks upon him as to leave no doubt he had been brutally murdered ; then the keeper went on to narrate how, though he had not formed one of the searching party that night, he had gone with Mr. Curtice and the groom at daybreak next morning to examine the place where the Squire's body had been found, how they had found his walking-stick and come to the conclusion that he had been killed some little distance from the clump of trees and carried there afterwards, and further gave the reasons why they had arrived at this conclusion, and also believed that the cowardly deed was the work of two men and not one.

"And is there no clue whatever to the assassins?" asked Gauntlett.

"Not that I've heard on," said Wilkinson, "but Mr. Curtice conducts all enquiries himself. He was at it the whole day yesterday, and he's in and about

and all over the village whenever he can get away from the house."

"And my aunt and cousins?" enquired Rob.

The keeper shook his head as he answered "Very bad; it was an awful thing for them to have the Squire brought home in that way, and he looking an all just as well as ever he did in his life; there's nothing else talked of round here, and if ever the scoundrels who did it are laid hands on in Saxham, it'll be all the police can to do to get them alive out of the village; the people are in no temper to wait long for justice to be done to the Squire's murderers."

"Thank you, Wilkinson," replied Gauntlett, and jumping into the carriage he drove on again. On arriving at the house, he at once asked for Curtice, and on being told he was in the library made his way thither. As the cousins shook hands, Henry remarked:

"This is an awful business, Rob."

"Terrible," he replied. "I have heard no particulars except what I gathered from Wilkinson at the Lodge. How are my aunt and cousins, utterly prostrate I'm afraid?"

"It's heart-breaking to see them," replied the other, "time does temper such things we know or else upon my word I think my aunt will never get over it, while as for Rosie there's no doing anything with her; Jenny as we know has more control, and

though poor girl, she no doubt feels the shock of her father's death as acutely as the rest, what we should do without her I can't think."

"I suppose they'll see me?"

"I don't know," said Curtice very gravely. "I think you had best, if possible, see Jenny first. I am awfully sorry for you, but my dear Rob you don't quite know all your trouble yet. I'll bring Jenny here if I can."

While his cousin was away Gauntlett paced the room impatiently. What could Henry mean, had he not just lost the best uncle that ever lived, were not all those nearest and dearest to him plunged into the deepest affliction, was it not his duty as soon as he could get away from the Grange to go and comfort his mother for the loss of her only brother? That he was well nigh ruined he had hardly given a thought to, that seemed a mere bagatelle compared to all the other sorrows that had come upon him. Good Heavens! What *could* Henry mean, what *did* Henry mean, what further trouble could there be in store for him? At this juncture his conjectures were cut short by the opening of the library door, and Jenny, looking deadly pale in her sombre draperies, glided into the room.

"Oh, Rob dear," she said in a low tone as she held out both her hands to him "what madness possessed you to do it?"

"Do it? Do what?" exclaimed Rob.

"I can hardly tell you," faltered the girl, "it's too terrible; it has rendered Rosie almost distraught; it only occurred to her last night after the receipt of your telegram. I can't tell what put it into her head, but her belief in it is so strong that she's persuaded mama it's the case, and I myself hardly know what to think."

"But what is it? What is it? What have I done?" enquired poor Rob, more thoroughly perplexed than ever, and feeling conscious of an impending blow.

"She has taken it into her head," replied the girl softly, "that your entering that horse in poor papa's name killed him."

"Where is she? I must see her at once, how horrible!" exclaimed Gauntlett.

"No, indeed you mustn't, you can't," she replied quickly, seizing his hand, "she will not see you, she has no grounds for it, but it is her fixed idea that you have caused papa's death. Rob, it is most painful for me to have to tell you all this, but you cannot see either mama or Rosie at present. They both think that your foolish freak caused poor papa's"—and here involuntarily a little choking sob abruptly finished Jenny's speech.

Gauntlett threw himself back in a chair, and covered his face with his hands. This was worse than he had ever dreamt of, that the girl he was engaged to should regard him as her father's

murderer was painful in the extreme—the idea had never crossed his mind before, but it flashed across him now, that unless the crime was otherwise cleared up, that might always be the reason assigned for it.

"I am very very sorry for you," continued Jenny at length, "it's a sore trouble to follow so close on our great sorrow, but it is so, neither mama nor Rosie could bear to see you, now; time may show them they're mistaken, or they may get over it, but your seeing them at present is out of the question. Good-bye, and God help us all!" and the girl pressed his hand and passed quietly from the room.

Left to himself Gauntlett sat like a man almost stupefied, what was he to think—what was he to do? Fate could surely have no further darts left to hurl at him, could it be possible that his entering a horse in his uncle's name had given occasion for the tragedy?—and while he was thus musing, Curtice again entered the room.

"Jenny has told you all, Rob, and it is as she says. I was only told of it a little before your arrival. I don't know enough about turf matters to know whether there is a possibility that this might have led to the crime, but at the present moment the murder is very inexplicable, it is impossible to suspect anybody in the village, and so far I have only been able to hear of one stranger who has been staying in the place lately, and until I was made

acquainted with this idea of Rosie's I certainly attached no importance to a strange gentleman having stayed for a night or so at the "Marquis of Granby" but from his talk or enquiries or something I was given to understand he was a sporting man. Like myself, I've no doubt, you are determined if you can to bring the assassins to justice."

"Certainly," said Gauntlett savagely, "what man on earth has such reason for hunting them down as I have? only tell me what I can do, and I'll do it with might and main."

"Having, as yet, no clue to guide us, we must of course push our investigations in every direction. Now, Rob, you can do no good here at present. What I want you to do is this: go back to Town, get hold of some of your racing friends, and make out if you can if there is anything to justify the suspicion that the race could have any possible connection with the murder; once let me get on the track, and I'll never rest until I hang the scoundrels—in the meantime, trust me for making every possible search and enquiry here."

"Thank you," cried Gauntlett, "you have given me something to live for. I felt when you came in, as if I should go mad, I wished my life was ended; but no, my work in this world is not done until our uncle's death is avenged. I'll go back to Town at once, and talk this thing over with my friends." With his usual impetuosity Gauntlett rang the bell

to consult the butler about the next train and something to take him back to the station.

"Don't take it too hardly," said Curtice as he bade him good-bye, "remember Rosie is an emotional child, and that in all this first agony of her sorrow, she would be sure to remember that she had promised not to see you again without his permission, that alone might make her unwilling to do so as yet. Once more, Good-bye."

Curtice was right; that thought had been uppermost in Rosie's mind from the first moment the awful truth was told them, she had reproached herself bitterly for having been cross and out of temper with her father during the last few days of his life, and the receipt of that unfortunate telegram had worked on her excited imagination and convinced her that her father's death was due to his having nominated Bobadil; an idea which racing men hesitated to subscribe to, struck though they were at the coincidence of the murder with the horse's victory.

The annals of the turf could doubtless furnish many instances of foul play having been enacted to prevent "favourites" from winning; horses have been nobbled, horses have been poisoned, and it is on record that one man, at all events, had hung for this last crime; but human life had so far never been attempted, and though the death of the nominator had many times prohibited a horse from starting, it had always been due to natural causes,

and turf history contained no experience of a racing man being consigned to a bloodstained grave by a set of scoundrels for their own nefarious ends.

But Rosie's knowledge of all such history was limited; like a true woman she had jumped to a conclusion and never troubled herself to find any reasons for having come to it, and as the course of this narrative has made pretty clear, her woman's instinct was justified though she couldn't say why she thought so. But even when Curtice and Gauntlett shall have legitimately worked up to that opinion, there will remain the problem—who were the actual perpetrators of the deed, and how was it to be proved against them? There were three men, as we know, who had a strong pecuniary interest in the disqualification of Bobadil, Barnes, Shelton and the Raven, and which, or which two, slew the Squire of Saxham, is a point which had yet to be determined. If the Raven's pecuniary interest in the crime seemed small compared with that of the other two, it must be borne in mind that wealth is after all a comparative affair, and that what would be affluence to one man, is poverty to another.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SETTLING.

IF there was one place in which the murder had been discussed more than another it was the "Marquis of Granby." Solemnly and with bated

breath during the whole of the day succeeding it was the crime talked over in all its bearings by the frequenters of that hostelry. Mixed with genuine sorrow for the Squire's untimely end, there naturally arose the question, who could have done this thing? and the first suggestion of unexplainable crime in a village community is invariably "tramps." To the supposition of tramps the fact that one or two of these shiftless vagrants had been seen about the place lately of course contributed. The news that the Squire's watch was also missing was considered conclusive evidence of this theory, and it was not long before three or four of these luckless gentry were apprehended in the vicinity of Saxham, although further than that they were wanderers probably by choice and happened, unluckily for themselves, to be in the neighbourhood at the time the crime was committed, there was nothing to justify their temporary detention. So awe-struck were the community at such a tragedy taking place within their midst that, pecuniarily concerned though most of them were, they actually almost forgot that it was the day of the "big race." It was not till evening when somebody came over from the station, and brought the news of Bobadil's victory, that Saxham sadly remembered it was the Cæsarewitch Day. Ah! there will be no bells rung on this occasion, no rejoicings, no gratuitous ale flowing at the "Marquis of Granby," the shadow

of death is over the village, and its lord lies low. The enquiries closely pressed during the afternoon by Curtice recalled to the minds of John Crowder, and one or two of his cronies, the gentleman from London who a little while back had been so interested in hearing all about Bobadil, and been so anxious to see the Paddocks. The news of the horse's success causes Mr. Crowder to shake his head solemnly, and wonder whether that stranger had profited by his advice.

"Though," said John sadly, "I little thought we should receive the news in this fashion. Ah, me! to think of the good old days when the Squire was young, and word came down his colours had got home in front."

But now Curtice had got this hint he lost no time in pushing inquiries about what strangers had been seen recently in the village, right and left. Above all, he impressed upon those he examined, and he *did* cross-examine John Crowder and others with a closeness and subtlety that would at once have won him distinction at the Old Bailey, that it was not such strangers as tramps or labouring men he was looking for. "Remember it's well-to-do strangers I'm seeking, Crowder; such a stranger, for instance, as the sporting gentleman you had staying here a week or so back. Tell me, for instance, all you can recollect about him."

Now when a man has no marked peculiarity, and

is of ordinary stature, it is astonishing not only how difficult his "fellows" find it to describe him, but also how they vary in their descriptions. There were plenty of people who remembered seeing the London gentleman, but after talking to pretty well all of them, Curtice was fain to confess that no picture of this man's personality presented itself to his eye. Some said he was darkish; some wouldn't call him that; he was neither short nor tall. They would all swear that he had neither red hair, a squint, nor a hump; but what he *was* like the young barrister was fain to confess that he was quite unable to make out; that he was a very pleasant gentleman, and seemed fond of a bit of racing, they agreed. If some of them said they should know him again there were quite as many who only *thought* they should, who wouldn't be quite sure till they saw him. Curtice, however, was not in the least discouraged at his want of success so far. He had no expectation that tracing the murderers would be an easy task, and now the cause of the crime had been suggested to him, he had no doubt it had been cunningly planned and executed by men of keen intelligence. The one thing that puzzled him in the present theory was, what had induced men of the class he suspected to take the Squire's watch; they must have anticipated making a large sum of money by the murder, crafty villains of this kind would know what a com-

promising article such a thing as that would be if it were ever traced to their possession, and already an accurate description of that watch had been sown broadcast about the country by the police, for one or two of the best officers of Scotland Yard were already in charge of the case, though what their theory might be about it they kept, after their wont, to themselves.

It was not to be supposed in enquiries, that Curtice would neglect the post-office, and there he picked up a piece of intelligence, and though he could make nothing of it at present he thought it might probably lead to something in the future. The post-mistress perfectly remembered a Mr. Tomlinson calling there for letters about the time mentioned; he was very talkative, and enquired a good deal about the family at the Grange. She had never seen him before, but felt certain she should know him again. He said it was his first visit to Saxham, and that he was staying for a night or two in the village; she couldn't remember where.

As soon as it was spread about that "Mr. Henry," as they always called him, was collecting information about all the strangers who had been seen in the place of late, many of the villagers came forward and volunteered their assistance. Curtice, sifting the corn from the chaff with all the trained intellect of his profession, soon became aware that the "Wrexford Arms" could also boast of having

entertained a stranger so lately as the Saturday and Sunday preceding the murder, but so far he could not be quite sure whether the guest at the "Marquis of Granby" and he of the "Wrexford Arms" were different men or one and the same; he thought the former, but was not quite clear. The waiter of the latter inn was much more positive than the frequenters of the other house as to the appearance of the stranger, a dark florid gentleman; he remembered him perfectly. A singular thing, he had never heard of the Croftstone Ball, and he, the waiter, recommended him to back Bobadil. They had had some talk about it, but the gentleman didn't seem to care about racing, some gents didn't. He only stayed one night, and went back to London again by the afternoon train on Sunday; he was quite certain he should know him again if he saw him. It was early to speak yet, but it began to strike Curtice that what he had stigmatized as Rosie's wild guess might have something in it after all.

When Rob Gauntlett came back to his rooms in Town, he found a letter on his table from Lyster. Jim had left Newmarket that same night by a later train than Gauntlett, whom he had not seen since they had parted at lunch, but within an hour of the time Rob had left the Heath, the nature of the objection had oozed out, and was widely spread. Lyster was horror-stricken at the idea that the man whose guest he had so lately been should have

been brutally done to death. He saw at once that such an objection would hardly have been made without very strong grounds to go upon; not finding Gauntlett he guessed that he had left the course, and at once followed him into Newmarket, only to find that Rob had left his lodgings and started for London. When Jim saw the evening papers, it never occurred to him to doubt the truth of the statement; he talked it over at his club with many other men who, though struck like himself with the coincidence that the murder should happen so opportunely for the owner of Plutarch, still did not connect the two. He wrote a letter of condolence to Gauntlett, on seeing the news confirmed in the morning papers, expressed his deep sympathy with the sorrow that had fallen upon the Grange and all connected with it, and wound up by saying, "If by any possibility I can be of the slightest help to you in your bitter trouble, only let me know."

"The very man," thought Gauntlett. "Lyster's been racing any time the last ten years, and Henry I know has a great opinion of him, he *is* the very man to talk things over with." And Rob at once sat down and wrote a line to Lyster begging him to come to him as soon as he possibly could as he wanted his advice and assistance badly.

Jim lost no time in complying, and after expressing how shocked and sorry he was, sat down to

listen quietly to what Gauntlett might have to say to him. He listened gravely and attentively to all the details of the murder as far as they were yet known, and could not refrain from a slight start of surprise upon hearing of the conclusion to which Rose Wrexford had instinctively jumped.

“It’s very odd, Gauntlett, that should have occurred to Miss Rosie; the coincidence has been remarked upon by heaps of fellows, but I never knew of such a case in my time, nor have I ever heard of such a case in the past. However that’s nothing to do with it, murder has been committed many a time for the sake of money, and that’s what this resolves itself into. These men had a strong motive for wishing the Squire’s death, and from what you tell me it’s difficult to assign a motive to anyone else; to see if there were any grounds for suspicion I should think would not be difficult; report says already that those connected with Plutarch won a very large stake, judicious enquiry next Monday at the settling would tell us for certain who were the great winners over the race; and secondly, though not so easy to get at, I shouldn’t at all despair of finding out who would have been the heavy losers by Bobadil’s success. When we have ascertained these points, we must endeavour to find the whereabouts of these gentry on the Tuesday afternoon.”

“Exactly,” exclaimed Rob, “and then we can

either make them account for themselves, or at once charge them with the crime."

"No, no, Gauntlett, that will never do, you can't charge men with murder in that hand-over-head fashion; besides, you would defeat your own ends, nothing gives a criminal such a chance as not waiting till your case is complete against him. No, I'll make the enquiries at Tattersall's because I think I can do it as well as any one, it will all come out naturally in the gossip over last week's doings; when once we've done that, I think we had best leave it to the police to hunt them down; if we've struck the right track, the trained blood-hound's always better than the untrained, and if I know anything of Curtice he has already invoked their assistance down at Saxham."

"Yes," returned Rob, sadly, "Henry is untiring. He says his place is on the spot, and he has instituted a most rigid enquiry as to what strangers have been seen in the place lately, though I don't know as yet with what success. As to me—the Grange is closed to me for ever," and he dropped his head upon his hand in such a hopeless, despairing manner, that Lyster stared at him in blank amazement as he ejaculated: "Closed to you for ever?"

"Yes," continued Rob, "what do you think they all look upon me as, down there, my aunt, Rose, the girl I hoped to be married to?—my God!—they look upon *me* as my uncle's murderer—they won't

see me, say they shall never be able to bear the sight of me again."

"Stop!" cried Lyster, "I know what you mean, my poor fellow. That had not struck me before—You mean that your whim of entering Bobadil in the Squire's name, cost him his life, and I suppose if we're right in our conjectures—it did. But this is a splitting of straws—going back to first causes—that would make the most innocent guilty. No one can hold that your uncle's blood lies upon your head; and it is cruel, as well as false, to pretend such a thing; you must make allowance for the shock of their first sorrow. As soon as their minds have recovered their balance, they will be ashamed that they ever so wronged you. God knows! misery enough has fallen upon you all, without conjuring up further woes in your own morbid imaginings."

Rob made no reply, but he gripped his comforter's hand warmly. They had been nothing but mere acquaintances till the last few days; but fate had decreed that they should be staunch friends from henceforth.

One Monday, as had been agreed between them, Lyster appeared at Tattersall's. He was attired in half-mourning, out of respect for the memory of the Squire, and for a few minutes, an awe fell upon the Subscription Room, when he announced that he represented Mr. Gauntlett, who was absent attending the funeral of his murdered uncle. He further

went on to say that the bulk of Mr. Gauntlett's liabilities would be discharged that afternoon by himself and Mr. Gauntlett's usual commissioner; and that, for the remainder, he must ask a week's time. A low hum of approval ran round the room; they were all aware that, though Gauntlett had virtually won the Cæsarewitch, he had had a very disastrous race. A notice over the mantelpiece had informed every one whom it might concern, that, the objection had proved fatal; that the Stewards, therefore, disqualified Bobadil, and awarded the stakes to Plutarch; all bets to go with the stakes.

In the course of the afternoon, Lyster had little difficulty in ascertaining that the three biggest *winners* over the race were, Mr. Grueby, the presumed owner of Plutarch, Horace Barnes, and a man of the name of Taylor; they were all book-makers, and reported to have won a very large sum amongst them. In what proportion it was to be divided, nobody knew; but one of Lyster's informants assured him that Barnes had quite as much to say to the management of Plutarch, as ever Grueby had. Gauntlett's commissioner also told Lyster, in answer to his questions, that he fancied Shelton would have been pretty hard hit by the victory of Bobadil.

"He was not one of the early operators," said the commissioner; "but when he became a strong favourite he never left him; he was one of his most

persistent opponents, and stood in my book to the tune of four or five thousand, laid quite at the last.'

"And Barnes?" queried Jim; "we all know he laid that big bet of ten thousand against Martin's lot at Doncaster."

"Yes," was the reply; "and I fancy that he laid some long shots too, at the beginning of the piece, but to tell you the truth, I had not then received any orders from Mr. Gauntlett, and paid very little attention to what was doing about Bobadil. I fancied it was only a fad of the public; and there is no keeping count of all their fancies. Barnes certainly didn't meddle with Bobadil at the finish, and though I shouldn't think Bobadil would be a *good* horse for him—I really don't know."

Jim walked out of the Subscription Room into the little court-yard behind, and sitting down on one of the benches, lit a cigar, and began to think over what he had heard. Grueby, Barnes and Taylor, principal winners. Shelton, and perhaps Barnes, would have been heavy losers by the success of Bobadil. Barnes and Taylor he knew well in their calling. Grueby, he knew, though he had never had any dealings with him; but as for Shelton, he didn't know him, even by sight; but then, as he reflected, although he had a tolerably extensive acquaintance with the fraternity, he did not pretend to know them all. He was still pondering over the results of his afternoon inquiries,

when suddenly flashed across his brain that incident of the afternoon before the Cæsarewitch; he had taken little heed of it at the time, and would have been puzzled to explain what recalled it to his recollection now, but all at once he saw that telegraph boy tearing through the Ring, and screaming "Barnes, Barnes!" at the top of his voice, and then he remembered the remark of the adjacent book-maker, "Don't break your voice over it, young 'un; it's no use your hollering, he isn't here."

Here was something for the police to go upon. Where was Barnes that afternoon, and what was in that telegram? The telegram might relate only to ordinary business, but that the bookmaker known to be in good health and present at Newmarket should not have been on the Heath in pursuit of his avocation on the afternoon before the Cæsarewitch was singular, and, under the circumstances, well worth looking into.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"DISCOVERY OF THE WATCH."

THERE was one individual at Saxham whom the result of the Cæsarewitch seemed to have affected not a little, and this was no other than Dick, the ostler at the "Marquis of Granby." The Raven had never been a popular character in the village and amidst a community that had for the most part

lost its money, it was very exasperating to hear his jubilant croaking over the upshot of the race. That he should be a winner when everybody else was a loser was bad enough, but that he should be perpetually remarking with a hoarse chuckle that he "never believed in them favourites" was especially irritating. The Raven had been always given to what is termed "a drop of drink," and he seemed inclined to leisurely dissipate his winnings in this wise; there was no asking his fellows to join him in his potations, that was not Dick's way, he consumed pots of ale and goes of gin in morose solitude, while now and again came from the corner he affected in the taproom a hoarse chuckle, and the remark that he "never believed in them favourites." He never got noisily or extensively drunk, but it was subject of remark that during all the years he had been at the "Marquis of Granby," he had never been so constantly muddled with drink as he was now.

"I don't know what's come to that Dick o' yours," remarked one of the neighbouring farmers to John Crowder, "he's always muzzy nowadays, seems as if he hadn't the pluck to get sober?"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said the landlord, "I'll pretty soon let him know that I'm not going to have that sort of thing in a respectable house, he'll have to get sober and keep sober, or go," and John Crowder said this with the air of a man who was not accustomed to have his authority disputed.

But on this occasion he was somewhat out in his reckoning. The bibulous Raven, on being sharply rated by his master, and told that "unless a change at once took place in his habits, he might seek employment elsewhere," retorted sulkily, "that he was quite willing to go, and the sooner the better, that Saxham was a poor place, and he was tired to death of it."

John Crowder waxed very angry; a most autocratic landlord, who, if any of his guests presumed to find fault with the wine or arrangements, would reply curtly: "If the 'Marquis of Granby' didn't suit them, they'd better go elsewhere." Such a man was not likely to brook insubordination on the part of one of his servants, and prefacing it by some strong expletives, he told the sullen and mutinous Dick "that he might take himself off that day week and needn't trouble to come to him for a character." The ostler apparently was perfectly indifferent to his discharge; far from coming, as his master rather expected after the liquor had died out of him, and expressing his penitence and hoping that Mr. Crowder would look it over, Dick assumed an air of defiance, and, if anything, drank rather harder than before.

Curtice, aided though he was by the advice of a London detective, had made but little progress in his investigations. The detective had stayed but a very short time at Saxham, and then frankly owned that he could be of no more service.

"The fact is, sir," he said, "your enquiries about strangers in the place have made 'em all so shy of one, that I can hardly get 'em to answer me a question. I think, from what we have made out, we may assume that the man who stayed at the "Marquis of Granby" and the man who stayed at the "Wrexford Arms" were two different men. I've a notion that drunken ostler at the former inn could tell us something if we could only catch him sober, but he's always so fuddled he can't recollect anything, or else from something he dropped when I first spoke to him, and before I knew as much of the case as I do now, it struck me that he'd spoken to both of them ; however, I can't get any more out of him. It might prove worth while all the same to keep an eye on him, but the key to the mystery is the watch ; once find the watch, and I'll guarantee we'll find the man."

"Ah !" replied Curtice, "so far we've failed, and I've come to the conclusion it won't be found in Saxham. The park has been searched, and all the roads leading to the village—every place we can think of."

"A watch don't take much hiding, sir," said the detective, with a smile, "besides, it was most likely taken away ; it's not been pawned as yet, you may be pretty sure ; it may have got into the hands of a 'fence,' and if so, the case is in the melting-pot before now, still, for all that, there'll be the works, and the maker might be able to recognise *them* ;

it's not likely they took that watch merely to throw away. Good-bye, sir; my opinion is that there is nothing more to be done in Saxham, until Saxham has quieted down."

This was all Curtice had to tell Rob Gauntlett on the day of the poor Squire's funeral, at which they both figured as chief mourners. Rob, on his part, told how he had called Lyster into his councils, on which Henry manifested extreme satisfaction, and then went on to say, "that until he got back to town and learned what that gentleman had been able to pick up at Tattersall's he could say no more."

"It was Lyster's own proposal," he said. "Jim declared that this was just a bit that he could manage as well as anyone. I know what a high opinion you have of him, and I know now what a thorough good fellow he is. I told him of *all* my misery here, I was so miserable I was *obliged* to tell someone, and no brother could have been kinder; I suppose there's no hope that they would see me yet, is there?"

Curtice shook his head. "Not yet, Rob," he replied gravely, "the first agony over, I feel sure they'll see the injustice they're doing you. Yes, you may trust Jim Lyster, you couldn't have consulted a better man."

The funeral over Gauntlett returned at once to Town, and on his arrival at his rooms found a note from Lyster, to say that he had discovered quite

enough to justify *suspensions*, that he would drop in in the course of the evening and tell him all that he had found out and what steps he had taken. Jim was a man of promptitude, and when, having thought the thing out, he left Tattersall's, he jumped into a hansom cab and drove straight to Scotland Yard; there he at once asked to see the officer who had the Saxham murder case in hand, and then shortly and succinctly Lyster told him his story, pointing out the extraordinary coincidence of the murder with the race, and the strong monetary interest these four men, Grueby, Taylor, Barnes and Shelton had in Bobadil's defeat, more especially the two latter. He pointed out that Barnes was undoubtedly absent from Newmarket on the afternoon of the murder, which, in itself, was singular, and that, for all he knew, Shelton might have been also.

“Steady! if you please, Mr. Lyster,” said the officer quietly, taking up a pen and ink, “you have discovered more than enough to make it imperative upon us to work out the clue you suggest; I'm going to put it down in writing as shortly and clearly, I trust, as you have told it. We've never had a case of this kind connected with the Turf before, but there's plenty of motive suggests itself here, and the want of that, so far, is what has so puzzled us. My colleague in the case, for instance, lays great stress upon the watch; I differ from him, and think that granted we *do* find

the watch, we shall be still some way off having found the murderers." And then the officer dipped his pen into the ink and commenced to write rapidly.

"Well," said Jim, when narrating his afternoon's experiences to Gauntlett that evening, "to cut a long story short, the officer took down my story, asked me one or two unimportant questions, but nevertheless contrived to elicit the fact that I did not know Shelton by sight, and wound up by saying, 'You may thoroughly depend that this clue will be worked out, Mr. Lyster; in the meantime, I will ask you and Mr. Gauntlett not even to *breathe* your suspicions to anyone. I gather from you that these men received by far the largest part of their winnings this afternoon; if, being guilty, they are alarmed, it is needless to point out their first impulse will be to fly the country, and though as quickly as it can be managed they will be all watched from this out, it's quite possible they might be off before we've got our eye on them.'

"Now," continued Jim, "there is common sense in all this man says, and we've simply got to keep our mouths shut; you'd better let Henry Curtice know all about it, he's a fellow not given to cackle, and if I were you I would just hint to him that the more searching his enquiry is at Saxham, the better; it diverts all suspicion from our enquiry, and I'd bet a shade of odds that this is the true trail."

Gauntlett readily agreed to take his friend's

advice, and they separated for the night with that understanding. As Lyster pointed out, his uncle's death afforded Rob a pretext for keeping out of society for the present, and thereby escaping any discussion of the race and the painful circumstances attending it.

When Curtice received Gauntlett's report, which he did within a couple of days of the funeral, he came to the conclusion that they were fairly on the track of the murderers, and marvelled greatly at the almost instinct which had made Rose Wrexford connect the crime with the race. It was true that the detectives differed and that the incident of the watch was difficult to explain; when there suddenly turned up in Saxham a piece of evidence that completely upset all his ideas on the subject. Only the day after he had got Gauntlett's report, Curtice was told that John Crowder, of the "Marquis of Granby," wanted to see him; he ordered the landlord to be shewn into the library, and in a few minutes Crowder, rather damp and looking like a man literally bursting with important intelligence, stood before him.

"Good morning, John," said Curtice, "what brings you out a wet morning like this, what is it?"

Mr. Crowder's cheeks distended, his eyes seemed almost starting out of his head, the secret that oppressed his breast was so overpowering that he was unable to disembroil himself of it. The man

was evidently in such a tremendous state of excitement as to be almost incapable of speech; twice he essayed, but the words seemed too big for his mouth. At last, tearing open his overcoat, he thrust his hand into his pocket, and placed upon the table—the missing watch.

Curtice started—he recognised it at once—and exclaimed, “Good God, John! where did you find this?”

The landlord gave vent to two or three little groans, and then gasped out, “It’s a long story, Mr. Henry, and has been almost too much for me, but if you’ll let me sit down and have a little brandy, I’ll tell it you all as well as I can.” Having been accommodated with a chair, and a pretty stiff glass of the restorative he requested, John Crowder commenced his story, which Henry knew, from experience, he had best leave him to tell in his own way.

“Well, sir,” he said, “it ain’t to be supposed you’ll recollect all about my family, but my eldest daughter’s married, and she and her little boys are staying with me just now on a visit. Well, the morning was so wet their mother wouldn’t let ’em go out to play in the garden as they generally do—you know what confinement to the house means to children; it’s rather rough upon the kids to have to keep quiet, it makes ’em restless like; they weren’t very long before they slipped down the stable-yard, and began to play about there. You know what

boys are, sir, it's their delight to get into all the odd out of the way corners they shouldn't—the dirtier the better."

Curtice was as cool-headed as any barrister need be, but his lips literally itched to exclaim, "Do get on, get on a little faster," but he refrained, and John Crowder, having composed his nerves with what he called a "stiffener," was revelling in all the importance of a diffuse narrator with a story to tell.

"When they came in, they were in a pretty pickle, and their mother began blowing them up, and asked them where they had been to get into such a mess. They said they had only been play-at 'hide and seek' up in the hayloft, and then *I* pitched into them, and called 'em nasty little warmints, and then they began to whimper, and I noticed Tommy, the eldest, was keeping his fist very close shut, so I asked him what he'd got there, and there it was, the Squire's watch. Of course I asked him where he found it, and it turned out that he'd found it up in the hayloft. 'Betsy, my girl,' says I, 'you take them two kids o' yours up stairs, stuff 'em with cakes, or do anything you like, but don't you let 'em out of your sight, or let 'em speak to anybody till I come back, I'm off to the Grange, to shew this to Mr. Henry, and ask him what's to be done; mind, don't you open your mouth, or let the kids open theirs about this, till I come back.'"

"No reason to tell you, John, that the discovery

of this watch, and where it was found, are of the greatest importance."

"And to think of it being found at the 'Marquis of Granby' of all places in the world."

"I think I understood you to say that you were quite positive that you had no stranger at your inn on the day of the murder?"

"Quite right, sir, I'm sure we had not."

"And this hayloft?" said Curtice.

"Has been hardly used of late years; in the old coaching days they changed at the 'Marquis of Granby,' the stables were then pretty full and we used a deal of hay, and were sometimes hard put to stow it away, but now the other hayloft, which is much more convenient, is amply sufficient."

"Then is this old loft wholly disused now?" inquired Curtice.

"I can't quite say that, I daresay there are a good many packing cases and wine hampers put up there still. I don't know, I haven't been in it for years."

"And who would be likely to go into it?"

"Dick, that drunken ostler whom I'm just getting rid of, I daresay might," rejoined the landlord, "and perhaps one or two of the other men about the yard."

"Very good, John. I'll tell you what we're going to do. You and I are going straight back to search that hayloft at once; in the meantime you were quite right to tell your daughter to say nothing to any one till you got back."

As they walked down to the “Marquis of Granby,” Curtice reflected that the discovery of the watch would be sure to be known all over the village before night ; that his searching the hayloft would also be pretty sure to be noticed. He further elicited from John Crowder, that Dick the ostler was known to have won a good bit of money over the race ; that he’d been more or less drunk ever since its decision, and for that reason, he, John Crowder, had given him notice, and that he was leaving his service in four days. “Suspicion,” thought Curtice, “points to this man. If I wait till he has left Saxham, the chances are it will be very difficult to lay hands upon him again.” He made up his mind and determined that he would arrest the ostler on suspicion. When the pair entered the inn yard they were consequently accompanied by a policeman. While the landlord went into the house to fetch his grandchild, Curtice made a few enquiries among the stablemen ; he ascertained that since the race the Raven had done but little work. That since he had received notice, he had even given up the *pretence* of doing any, and that at the present moment he was to be found, in a half-fuddled state, in his favourite corner in the tap-room.

By this time John Crowder rejoined him with his grandchild, and the party proceeded to the foot of the ladder leading to the loft. On the way the child, a sharp little boy of six or seven years old,

explained that he had only found the watch just before the bell rang for their dinner, and having no thought of it's being so late, he and his brother had scuttled back to the house at once, expecting to be scolded. It was evident that the boy was highly delighted at being invited to join the searching party, and had visions of much "treasure trove" on being allowed to push his investigations further. When they ascended the ladder and entered the loft it was pretty much what John Crowder had described it, littered with packing cases, wine hampers, and a lot of the straw used in packing them. In one corner was a remnant of the hay with which the loft had been once filled, and its somewhat musty condition accounted for its not being thought worth removing. The boy went at once to the hay which he pointed out as the scene of his discovery; some three feet above the top of this hay a brick had been evidently taken out of the wall, and the aperture was half filled with hay. The child explained that when they first found it, it had been quite full, and that he had pulled some of it out in the idea that it might be a bird's nest, and found the watch behind it, and that then, as he had told them, the dinner bell rang, and they had scampered back to the house as fast as their legs could carry them.

"Suppose you pull out the remainder of the hay," said Curtice, "and see if you can find anything more at the back of it."

The boy asked nothing better, and in a few seconds another handful or two of hay was pulled out. It was too dark to see into the aperture, and thrusting in his hand, the child cried delightedly :

“Yes, there’s two things, a bag of something, and a pocket-book,” and he drew forth first the one and then the other and handed them to Curtice.

“Anything more ? ” asked the latter.

“No, sir,” was the reply, and then the trio went back to the door of the loft to investigate what they had found.

The bag was a brown holland bag, and, though exceptionally dirty, such a one as is used by farmers and dealers to carry samples of corn. It was almost full of gold, although there were two or three bank-notes at the top. At a rough guess there was probably from a hundred to a hundred and fifty pounds in it. The coarse greasy note-book was full of cabalistical figures, which the child, as his sharp eyes caught them, pronounced “sums,” but which Curtice at once guessed to be the betting memoranda of a very illiterate man.

Mr. Crowder’s face of amazement was a study. “The d—d scoundrel,” he said, “how could he have known the poor Squire had all that money upon him ? ”

“We don’t know what he had,” said Curtice, gravely, shaking his head, “though it’s not the least likely he had such a sum as this about him.

Your ostler must have found betting a much more profitable occupation than he was supposed to do."

"Why, you don't think, Mr. Henry," said Crowder, "that the Raven made all that mort of money betting, do you?"

"I'm not going to think about it," replied Cur-tice. "I only think this, that I've quite enough to justify me in giving your ostler into custody, and I'm going to do it this minute."

Five minutes afterwards and the bemused Raven was dragged from his corner in the tap-room, and, with gyves upon his wrists, marched off in custody to the village lock-up, there to remain till the police could come over from Croftstone and convey him to Croftstone Gaol.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE SQUIRE'S WILL."

THE Raven, when arrested, preserved an air of sullen indifference; the man, indeed, was so muddled with drink that it was an open question whether his indifference was assumed, or whether he really did not quite understand what was happening to him. When the handcuffs were placed upon his wrists, he roused himself a little and asked what he had done to be treated like that for. On being told that he was charged with being concerned in the murder of Squire Wrexford, he retorted that he

"knoa'd nothing about it," and then relapsed into silence, which he rigidly maintained during his removal to Croftstone Gaol. There, though manifesting no uneasiness at his unpleasant situation, he exhibited considerable curiosity as to why this charge had been made against him, and whether anybody else had been arrested in connection with it. When informed by his custodians that the dead man's watch had been found in his possession, he rejoined curtly, "Thee's a liar"—and, to speak exactly, so far he was right—and became once more silent. But his face undoubtedly betrayed signs of considerable anxiety. The discovery of that pocket-book Curtice had kept as far as possible to himself, and at all events he only knew the importance of its contents, and how thoroughly it identified the Raven as the possessor of the watch and money.

On Dick's appearance before the magistrates, Curtice had produced the watch and bag of money, describing how they had been found in the disused hayloft, which was only frequented by the prisoner, and confined himself to offering only sufficient evidence to justify him in applying for a remand. The young barrister thought he saw his way into a totally conclusive case against the prisoner, but it was as yet a good way off being complete. He was further convinced that Horace Barnes was an accessory to the deed, but had considerable doubts as to

whether he should be able to prove it. The remand was at once granted ; a foul and brutal murder had been committed, and there was not a man in all the country round but was anxious to see the assassins of Squire Wrexford brought to justice.

Henry Curtice had his hands pretty full at this time, and there seemed little chance of his getting back to his chambers in London for some weeks to come. It was necessary now to look for the Squire's will, and even Mrs. Wrexford did not know where he had deposited it. The Squire's London lawyers had informed Curtice that it was not in their hands, that they had drawn one some five or six years back, which had been signed by the Squire and duly attested in their office, but that he had taken it away with him, and they presumed it would be found amongst his papers at Saxham. However, there was no great difficulty about finding it, and, after a short rummage through the dead man's papers, his last will and testament was duly come across. Curtice had written to Rob Gauntlett to come down and be present at the reading of it, but Rob had replied that it would be far too painful for him to come to Saxham under existing circumstances, and that as long as things remained as they were, he should never set foot in the Grange. "God knows," he continued, "that no one can more sincerely regret my poor uncle than I do, and it will always be a bitter memory to me that a whim of

mine indirectly led to his death. His will can never concern me. The last time I saw him he told me he would never give his daughter, nor leave Saxham, to a gambler. As you doubtless know, I was his accepted son-in-law only on probation, and not the least of my sorrows just now is that time has not been vouchsafed me to show him I will be staunch and true to the promise I then gave."

It was not to be supposed that Henry Curtice did not feel a little curious to see how the Squire had finally disposed of his property, but he determined not to look at the will before reading it to his aunt and cousins. Whatever his intentions might have been, a man cut off so suddenly as Tom Wrexford would have little opportunity of carrying them out, and therefore it was probable that the late events had very little to say to the will the Squire had left behind him. The awful manner of his death had served as a reason for invitations to the funeral being confined to their immediate neighbours, and the same cause prompted that the reading of the will should be limited to those solely connected with it. Curtice accordingly read it to his aunt and cousins in the library, with no other people present. It was simple in the extreme, and seemed to have been drafted before the death of his son, then altered, and finally drawn as it stood at present just after that event. His daughters were left twenty-five thousand pounds each; a thousand pounds

apiece was left to Curtice and Gauntlett, and with the exception of a few trifling legacies, the Saxham Estate and all the residue of his property was left to his beloved wife, Margaret Eleanor Wrexford, solely and entirely, to dispose of as she pleased. There was a rider to the effect that she perfectly understood his wishes with regard to Saxham, and that he trusted her to carry them out to the best of her ability, but the Grange and all appertaining to it were hers to do what she would with.

Mrs. Wrexford was considerably the most surprised of the four when Curtice had made the will clear to them; that everything should be left absolutely to her had never occurred to her; for her life—yes, that was possible, but Tom Wrexford had so constantly asserted his intention of making an heir to the Grange that she never doubted but one of her nephews would be legally named as his successor. The two girls had always regarded Rob Gauntlett as the heir of Saxham, but had never speculated much as to what would happen after an event that looked so far off as their father's death. Curtice alone felt no surprise; he was quite sure, had he lived, that before another five years had passed, his uncle would have decided for himself who was to be his successor at the Grange, and he quite understood that it was nothing but Rob Gauntlett's gambling propensities which had prevented him standing in that light at the present moment. The Squire had

been no vacillating man who could not make up his mind; if he had not come to a decision before, it had been simply because he would not allow his affections to override his judgment. Curtice knew that Rob was his uncle's favourite nephew, but he had only lately discovered that his uncle regarded leaving Saxham to Rob as only handing it over to the alien, that Rob's reckless propensities must shortly necessitate the parting of as many broad acres as were at his disposal, and that the Squire's feelings were strong upon the subject. He was gone to his account, and his widow was now the arbiter of the eventual destiny of the Saxham property.

Poor Rosie, she was looking very woebegone in her sombre draperies, with a hectic flush upon her pale face, which seemed to have shrunk to half its original size in the last ten days, and with a feverish light in her eyes that told of the severe mental struggle that had been and still was going on within her. She turned to her mother as Curtice finished reading, and said softly:

"I am very very sorry for Rob; I know, poor fellow, he didn't mean it, but it would have been too dreadful for him ever to have come here as ruler of Saxham. I'm sure, with papa's blood upon his head, he couldn't possibly wish it himself."

"Ah! my darling," said Mrs. Wrexford, "I only wish your father had been more explicit. What

does a woman know about the management of a large landed property? I would far, far rather he had settled things himself." And then she and Rosie withdrew without further comment.

"It is not what you expected, Henry," said Jenny, who had been watching his face closely while he read.

"I will not quite say that," he replied, "it is not what my uncle intended, but he had no time given him to carry out his intentions."

"We all looked upon it," she continued softly, "that he would leave Saxham to Rob, but ah!" she added with a slight shudder, "we thought that time was far away in the future."

"I fancy he would have done so," replied Curtice, "had he lived a few years longer, and had Rob held firmly to his promise to give up gambling. I haven't had time to think about it, and Rob hasn't said a word as yet, but I'm afraid he has lost an awful lot of money over this miserable race."

"You may well say miserable," said the girl, "poor Mama declares that every race-horse we have shall be sold as soon as it can be managed, and as for me, I never want to see a race-course again, nor hear a race spoken of. Do you think," she continued, sinking her voice, "that you have found out the man who did it? Do you think it was this wretched ostler that took my father's life?"

"I think," replied Curtice, "that he was one of

them, though the evidence against him is not conclusive as yet, but your father’s watch was as good as found in his possession.”

“It seems a dreadful thing to say of one’s sister,” she replied, “but I’m afraid we shall never pacify Rosie till the murderers are brought to justice. It has been bad enough for all of us, but she is of a very excitable nature, and is still in a state of feverish excitement, as you must have seen just now; she talks most wildly about it, she says she has not only lost her father but her lover, that an open grave stands between her and Rob, and works herself up so at times, that I do believe she almost imagines poor Rob took an active part in the crime. The doctor told me only yesterday that we must take her away from this as soon as we can, that there’s danger of her brain being seriously affected.”

“Poor child,” said Curtice, “it is very hard upon her, and of course this unhappy delusion about Rob makes it still harder to bear. Perhaps you’d better let me have a little talk with the doctor when he next comes, I shall be better able to advise you after I’ve spoken to him.”

“Thanks, Henry, if you would,” replied Jenny. “I have nobody to look to but you. Dr. Ridley is sure to be here in the course of the morning, and I’ll send him to you.”

Left to himself, Curtice recalled his musings some few weeks ago, how he had said to Lyster

that day in Hyde Park, talking over what would ultimately become of Saxham, that men's wills often contradicted their principles and assertions; the poor Squire had involuntarily done so. After always avowing his intention of making an heir to Saxham, his sudden death had prevented his doing so. He had been struck then, with how entirely Lyster had ignored his chance of succeeding his uncle at the Grange, and now it seemed that his aunt and cousins had never conceived such a thing as possible. Well, he supposed he was a fool ever to have thought it was, and yet his claim was quite as good as Rob Gauntlett's, indeed might be regarded in some people's eyes as better, in so much that he had never distinguished himself by such folly as had made Gauntlett notorious. However, he supposed Rob would eventually reign at Saxham now. He was not mercenary, he wished Rob no harm, and honestly believed that he would stick firmly to his resolution; still Curtice was a man who found it hard to make both ends meet, he was not extravagant, but he wanted money. He was conscious that a few thousands just now would further his chances in his profession not a little, he was grateful to his uncle for the legacy that he had left him, but felt that he could have done with more, and then he smiled as he muttered to himself: "I wonder who of us couldn't?" Here he was interrupted by the announcement of Dr.

Ridley, and that gentleman at once bustled into the room after his own peculiar fashion.

A clever capable man in his profession, yet nobody ever saw the doctor except in a hurry. People who imagined ailments never got on with him; though a little abrupt, he was kind-hearted, but he was not a man to distil gossip, and make small talk. He came straight to the point, and as a rule confined himself to the business in hand, but the murder of the Squire was an exceptional case. Men's hearts and minds around Saxham were strangely stirred about that, and people by no means given that way could not help stopping to exchange a word or two, if the murder was referred to.

"It's a bad business, Curtice," said the doctor as he shook hands, "Mrs. Wrexford is getting more composed, and bearing her sorrow quite as well as could be expected, while as for Miss Jenny, that young lady's a trump, that's what *she* is. It isn't that she don't feel it just as much as the others, but she's such a rare "plucked" one, and what they'd do without her I'm sure I don't know. But Miss Rose, I'm sorry to say, is not doing well at all, her case is getting serious, she's at times quite off her head on that one point—that Gauntlett's concerned in her father's murder; you must take her away from here as soon as possible. Take her abroad, try change of scene, anything to keep her mind from brooding on that one topic—the Squire's awful death; these

delusions require careful watching I assure you ; the result of a morbid imagination to begin with, they sometimes become permanent, and then a ruined life is the end of the pitiful story."

"I'm glad to have seen you, Dr. Ridley," replied Curtice, "we must do the best we can."

"Of course you will, my dear fellow, I know that, aren't you doing it now? I've a strong hope that the conviction and hanging of that scoundrel who killed the Squire will do my patient a lot of good. It will shew her that the law and the world in general don't regard Gauntlett as at all concerned in the crime. By Jove! from all I hear, that ostler chap you've got in Croftstone Gaol is the man."

"What makes you think that?" said Curtice sharply.

"Well, I was over at Croftstone yesterday, and lunched with the medical man in charge of the gaol, he's an old friend of mine, and of course we got to talking about the murder, nobody talks of anything else just now. He's quite convinced you've got the right man, says he was taken with the Squire's watch in his possession."

"Well, he wasn't quite that, though I think we shall be able to prove that it amounts to pretty much the same thing. But, my dear Dr. Ridley, your friend can't know more than the rest of us, and though we *think* we've got the right man, or one of them, we can't feel quite certain yet."

“Ah, well! I’ll tell you what he told me, and as this happens to be in his own line, and the result of his own observation, I’ll suppose you’ll give him credit for knowing what he’s talking about. He says that the prisoner had evidently been lushing very heavily for some days before he was apprehended, and that the abrupt cutting off of his drink, has brought him to a very low and contrite frame of mind—it does you know sometimes. He’s seen ’em that way before, and thinks in all probability this fellow will make a clean breast of it in another day or two.”

“Ah, confess!” exclaimed Curtice. “Up to this they tell me he has maintained the most obstinate silence, the best thing a guilty man *can* do, or perhaps an innocent one either, and has confined himself strictly to saying that he ‘knoa’d nothing about it.’”

“Ah, well!” replied the doctor, “perhaps he will speak out yet; at all events the sooner you hang him and his associates, if he has any, the better for the community at large, and my patient in particular. Good-bye,” and with this Dr. Ridley shook hands and bustled out of the room as abruptly as he had entered it.

CHAPTER XX.

“BARNES’S NERVE FAILS HIM.”

WITHIN forty-eight hours of his visit to Scotland Yard, Lyster was called upon by the officer he had then seen, and was told that they had made enquiries and that there was no doubt that Barnes had left Newmarket on the Tuesday morning and had not returned until an early hour next day. That Grueby and Taylor had been present at the races on Tuesday, and had not left the town until the meeting was over. With regard to Shelton, so far they had not been able to make out his movements; nobody seemed to be quite positive that he was there on the day named, but on the other hand nobody seemed at all sure that he was not, in fact the officer said: “we haven’t reckoned him up yet, but both Barnes and he are carefully watched. As for the others, there’s no necessity for keeping an eye on them, they both certainly took no active part in the murder, we could prove an alibi for them ourselves.”

“Then you’ve not been able to trace Barnes at all?”

“No,” said the officer, “not as yet.”

"Well, you haven't got on much," remarked Jim, "one good thing you've got your eye on that fellow Barnes, and if there's the least truth in our surmise, that this gang had anything to do with the murder, that chap's in it, and remember what I tell you, he's a noisy, swaggering blackguard, and I strongly suspect he's not a very good plucked 'un, he's just the sort to bolt if he thought things were getting dangerous for him."

"We're doing all we can, sir," said the officer, a little nettled at Lyster's disparagement of his efforts. "I suppose you've heard," he continued, with a cynical smile, "that they've got the murderer in Croftstone Gaol, took him red-handed as I understand, that is, with the missing watch in his possession?"

"No!" exclaimed Lyster, "who the devil is he?"

"He's the ostler of one of the inns down there; of course he swears he knows nothing about it, they all do that, and that's as much as he's opened his mouth at present, but of course he'll have to account for how he got hold of that watch, and then we shall see whether I or my mate was right. If you remember, sir, I said that I thought it was quite likely that when we'd found the watch, we'd still be a good bit off having found the man, and I'm not clear that they've got him now."

"You'd better come and see Mr. Gauntlett at

once, he can explain it better than I can, but as I understood him, the people who found the body were quite convinced that there were at least two men engaged in the crime."

They accordingly adjourned at once to Gauntlett's rooms, and Gauntlett narrated how the dead man had been found, the conclusion Wilkinson and Curtice had come to, and their reasons for it, and that he had heard them from their own lips. He said they were very clear about it, and had no doubt whatever that it was the work of two or more men. The officer listened very attentively, but, rather to Lyster's surprise, made no comment, nor did he ask any questions; the fact was he was conscious of having been rather too open in his speech, and blamed himself for having asserted so confidently that it was doubtful whether they had got the right man. There might have been two or three concerned in it, but it did not at all follow that they had not got one of them; in his heart of hearts he still clung obstinately to his first idea that the watch had nothing to do with the murder, but as things stood at present he felt that it would have been wiser not to commit himself to this opinion.

In answer to Gauntlett's anxious questioning as to what they had made out concerning Messrs. Barnes, Grueby and Co., the officer was far more reticent than he had been with Lyster, and that gentleman rose considerably in the detective's esti-

mation, by not in the least interfering with his story, and leaving him to tell Gauntlett just as little as he pleased of his researches. Lyster thought that the less the impetuous Rob knew the better, and rightly guessed that the officer was of the same opinion. Although he didn't say so, Jim was disposed to agree with the latter, and doubt whether the man in Croftstone Gaol was concerned in the murder. However, for the present certainly, the chief interest in the case seemed to be centred in Saxham, and it seemed more likely that the facts would come to light there, than from any enquiries the police might make at Newmarket.

"Sharp chap that Mr. Lyster," said the detective to himself, as he descended the staircase. "Might have done for us if he'd been brought up to the profession. He's learnt the first lesson of a detective officer—to keep his ears open and his mouth shut."

Rob Gauntlett, indeed, was having a very bad time of it just now; in addition to all his other troubles there had been divers consultations with his solicitors, and, as always happens in these cases, things when they were looked into proved considerably worse than Rob anticipated. Deep dipped before, this final plunge on Bobadil had made matters much worse. Money had to be borrowed at high interest to meet his liabilities on that direful Monday, which, being interpreted, meant

the giving of bills at short dates considerably in excess of the money actually lent. These bills had now to be met, and the lawyers saw nothing for it but the sale of the greater part of Rob's already diminished acres and the reduction of his patrimony to a very modest independence. Rob, indeed, would have enough left to live upon, but it would be to live a very different life to what he had hitherto done, in short, trying the difference between something like three or four thousand a year and three hundred. Better men have done it before Rob, and are doing it still, but the possession of the former income to begin with don't make it the easier.

Rob was grievously surprised; a man usually is when the schedule of his debts is first placed before him. He knew he had played ducks and drakes with his inheritance, but he had no idea it was as bad as this, the loss of money doesn't quite come home to men when they borrow on mortgage, and then it shot through his brain that if his uncle had lived he could not have gone to him and asked him for his daughter without having sufficient income to maintain her in anything approaching the position she had been accustomed to. Even if this horrible cloud had not come between them, how could he ask her to marry him now? It would be the meanest possible thing to attempt to hold her to her promise as things were with him, and, with all

his faults, Rob was not mean. No, it was impossible that Rose could ever be anything to him now, their love was a dream of the past, and the sooner he could teach himself to forget her, the better; his life seemed finished. What was he to do with his future? Gambling, yes, he had done with that. As the cynical Frenchman says, "We think we forego our vices, but it is our vices that have left us." It certainly seemed so with Rob Gauntlett; his virtuous resolution to give up "plunging" had come just when he had no more money left to gamble with. What was he to do? He might well ask that; that is usually the final problem of the reckless speculator when he finds himself gazetted to the "broken brigade."

After the manner of his kind, Rob Gauntlett yearned to talk matters over with somebody. He resolved his uncle's assassins, once brought to justice, to consult his new friend, Jim Lyster, upon the subject. He had thought that business of the murder would fully occupy his time for some weeks, but he found literally nothing to do, except listen to the little the police chose to tell him. What little had lain within their province, Lyster had accomplished in one afternoon, and avowed his opinion that the rest of the case had better be left to the agents of Scotland Yard. He saw Lyster every day, but had as yet taken him only very partially into his confidence about his pecuniary affairs; and

though Lyster felt pretty sure Rob was a very embarrassed man, he had no idea that things were as bad as they were. What was he to do? And the more Rob thought over the matter, the more puzzled he became. He reckoned up all his accomplishments in no disparaging spirit; but for the life of him he couldn't call to mind one by which it was possible to make money; on the contrary, being a good shot, and a fair cross-country performer, were only conducive to the spending of money—not to the making of it. "Still," he thought to himself, "as long as I get something to do, it does not so much matter; I've enough left to live upon, but, something to do I must have; something to take me out of myself. I don't want to think!" Poor Rob, he might hold himself innocent of his uncle's death, but he could not disguise from himself that, as far as his love affair went, his own folly would have placed him in the same position if that had not occurred.

The week's remand, for which Curtice had asked, soon slipped away, and the Raven was once more brought before the Croftstone magistrates. He had not fulfilled the prediction of the medical officer in charge of the gaol, and made a confession of his crime, but doggedly adhered to his old formula, that he "knoa'd nothing about it;" but upon this occasion, he abandoned the air of sullen apathy which he had previously maintained, and mani-

fested a lively curiosity in the case against him. He was obviously disconcerted when Curtice, alluding to the discovery of the watch, stated that though in the interests of justice it was not expedient to produce them at present, other articles had been found with it, one of which he should be shortly in a position to prove as belonging to the prisoner, that the prisoner alone was in the habit of frequenting the loft in which these things were found, and that it was difficult to suppose any one else could have concealed them there.

Here the solicitor who was watching the case on behalf of the Raven interposed, and said, "You have no right to make that statement, Mr. Curtice; the loft is open to anyone; as free of access to one person in the stable-yard as another; it is impossible to say that no one else entered it, and it is far more probable that the watch and other articles found, but which you don't produce, were hidden there by some one who was *not* in the habit of frequenting it."

"I think," rejoined Curtice, "we shall be able to show some of the property found undoubtedly belongs to the prisoner; a considerable sum of money, principally in gold and silver, cannot be identified; but there are also two or three bank notes, and these may possibly be traced. At all events, I must ask for a further remand."

The Raven's solicitor strongly opposed this; pro-

testing that there was no evidence whatever against his client, that the evidence against him amounted to no more than this—that the dead man's watch had been found in a loft in a stable-yard, in which the prisoner was employed; that there was nothing to prevent anybody about the inn going into that loft; or, as far as he could ascertain, anybody about the village, either by day or night; that if articles belonging to his client had been found there, why were they not at once produced? That if the notes were supposed to have been the property of the murdered man, there surely had been ample time to ascertain the fact, and that it was hard to keep a man in custody under the stigma of such a shameful charge, on mere suspicion.

Here the magistrates intervened, and said they wished to hear no further remark from either Mr. Curtice or the solicitor for the other side; that in their opinion there was quite sufficient evidence before them to justify their sending the case for trial; and consequently there would be no occasion for any further remand.

Although it had been expected, there was considerable excitement at Croftstone, and still more at Saxham, when it became known that Dick the Raven had been committed to take his trial for the wilful murder of Thomas Wrexford, of Saxham Grange. Saxham had already quite made up its mind as to the prisoner's guilt, and the luckless

man was tried continually by a self-constituted jury of his fellow villagers, presided over by John Crowder, in the parlour of the "Marquis of Granby." John Crowder and his intimates seemed to have transformed themselves into a band of detectives, and drove Curtice nearly mad with the useless information and shadowy discoveries that they so constantly brought him. Since his share in the finding of the missing watch, the money and the pocket-book, John Crowder posed as a great legal authority as well as a racing one, and his admirers now were quite nonplussed as to which he knew most of. The Saxham murder promised to be a very interesting case, and more than one of the leading London journals had sent down reporters to pick up what they could concerning it; it was hardly to be supposed that the discovery of the watch and the money had escaped these quick-eared caterers for the public, and the consequence was, that both of these facts were duly announced in the journals they represented. To the world generally it did not mean much, the pocket-book most likely being found with the watch and money would be recognised as the prisoner's and would go far to identify him as the secreter of both. As for the latter, it was not likely that poor Tom Wrexford carried such a sum about him, more especially in gold and silver, and it was curious that the ostler of a country inn should have amassed such a sum

as a silver bookmaker. But to one man the announcement of the discovery of that pocket-book came like a thunderbolt. Horace Barnes recollected that greasy pocket-book with a shudder, and remembered what he had written therein, he knew how such a bet as that therein recorded would be read by all racing men, or, for the matter of that, any other clear-headed person. He was not quite sure about it, but a terror came over him that those few lines with his name to them, in that greasy betting-book would go pretty near to making him an accessory to murder; he had played for a tremendous stake, and won it, but if that was to be the ultimate result of his success, better he had never been born. He had naturally never mentioned this circumstance to a soul, it was a secret between him and the man in Croftstone Gaol. The Raven had maintained unbroken silence so far, but how long could Barnes count upon its continuance? He had thought him at the time one whom he might trust to die mute, but now he saw some fear of being called upon to die himself, he began to understand how men, to ease their own minds, came to make a clean breast of it; there was such a thing too as saving your own neck by turning Queen's evidence. Could he rely upon the Raven holding his tongue, at all events, till his trial? if so, he would have time to make his preparations. It was now the beginning of November, and the chances

were the trial would take place in a few weeks. Barnes, so far, had not the slightest idea that any-one entertained the belief that the race had anything to do with the murder. He never suspected for one moment that he was already under the surveillance of the police; as far as he could see, the enquiry about strangers in the village of Saxham, had resulted in nothing, still, there was that accursed book in evidence against him; that book must be in somebody's hands at present, and the question was, would that somebody have the *nous* to interpret that bet aright. He must leave England before the trial; the sooner the better, he thought; but for fear of exciting suspicion, perhaps it would be as well to wait another week or ten days; above all, he would take no one into his confidence, more especially Shelton, for good and sufficient reasons. Racing was virtually over for the year, and there could be nothing remarkable in a bookmaker taking his holiday abroad.

CHAPTER XXI.

"ROB TURNS DETECTIVE."

IN accordance with his resolution, Rob Gauntlett was about to consult Lyster as to what he might find to do, when a brilliant idea suddenly flashed across him. He had sworn to hunt down his

uncle's assassins, and why should he not still? If the delicate enquiries necessary to trace out the movements of Barnes and Shelton were deemed better in the hands of the police, there was no reason he should not take his share for the next few weeks in watching those gentry; two pair of eyes were better than one. It would give him employment, at all events; he would go and talk it over with Lyster at once. Lyster heard what he had to say, and then observed:

"I don't suppose they'll much like it, but if you are to do it at all, it must be under the guidance of the police. Shadowing a man, I fancy, is not near so easy as you imagine. I've always been told it's astonishing how soon a man awakes to the fact that he is watched, and, of course, when he has reason to fear being so, he's much more on the alert. Barnes, too, knows you, and that in itself is an objection."

"Oh! I could disguise myself," interrupted Rob. "At all events, I've a great friend, who is employed in one of the minor theatres, who's a perfect dab at making up; I could guarantee that he would turn me out so that neither you nor anyone else should recognize me. Besides, you know, it would be my business to avoid speaking to him, or even attracting his observation."

"There you've hit it," returned Lyster; "that's the difficulty, but let's go down and talk it over

with Sergeant Boyce, the detective you met here the other day."

They accordingly proceeded at once to Scotland Yard, and as Jim expected, Sergeant Boyce demurred a good deal at availing himself of Gauntlett's proffered services.

"You don't know what it is, sir," said the officer, "watching a person without letting him know you're doing it. You must have your eye on him all the time without looking at him; you want to be able to see out of the back of your head like a woman; you'd better leave it in our hands, Mr. Gauntlett."

But this Rob positively declined to do, inadvertently he said he had caused the crime, and he had sworn to do his best to bring the assassins to justice. It was no use talking; he could not sit still and do nothing while others were tracking the murderers, and at last the officer gave a reluctant consent upon certain conditions. He stipulated that Rob should put himself under the orders of their own agent, and that under no circumstances, whatever he might think, should he precipitate matters, and endeavour to arrest Barnes on his own responsibility.

"He's very well watched, sir; closer than you will have any idea of, even when you *are* watching him, but we don't want to take him into custody yet awhile, unless he attempts to escape."

As to the matter of disguise, the officer did not seem to think there would be much difficulty about that. "It can't be too strongly impressed upon you, Mr. Gauntlett," he said, "that it's quite as much your object to avoid notice as to keep your eye on your man, and the moment you attract it, you become useless. Your disguise, therefore, cannot be too commonplace. Let me see you before you begin your task, and I'll introduce you to your colleague. You mayn't think much of his personal appearance, but he's one of the best men we have, and nothing is too trivial to escape his notice.

It had never occurred to Rob Gauntlett that, as long as you were not recognised, there could be any difficulty about watching a person; but the police will tell you that it is quite an art. It is astonishing how soon men instinctively become aware that they are under surveillance; it first comes with the vague consciousness that they are being watched, but this is speedily succeeded by the discovery of the personality of their watcher. A real expert in this delicate art ought to be a perfect comedian, able to assume a variety of appearances, for those who have been inconvenienced by such attentions on the part of the police would suspect either a clergyman or a cabman if they noticed him crossing their path oftener than seemed natural.

Gauntlett's colleague, whose acquaintance he had yet to make, was popularly known to the branch of

the Force to which he was immediately attached as the "Kid." He was a protégé of Sergeant Boyce's, who had picked him up, a veritable Arab of the streets, some few years previously. Low in stature, with a cunning, prematurely old face, the boy, for he was little more, was sharp as a needle. Some contravention of the law had originally brought him in contact with Sergeant Boyce, and that officer was so struck with the quickness and intelligence this waif of the gutter displayed that he took an interest in him, and lent him a helping hand on more than one occasion. The "Kid," who seemed to have had no belongings, and to have been turned into the streets to get his living as he best could, almost from childhood, soon developed an almost dog-like attachment to his patron; a boy of about thirteen or fourteen when the officer made his acquaintance, he picked up his living by running errands and doing all sorts of odd jobs. At this period of his career he missed no favourable opportunity of annexing such stray property as came within his reach. Sergeant Boyce's method of civilizing the little vagrant was simple though peculiar; he pointed out to him that it was better to be a thief-taker than a thief, and from that out the "Kid" became a hanger-on of the great detective officer, and at the present moment was, as the Sergeant rightly described him, "one of the sharpest subordinates in the Detective Force." In

spite of his face being prematurely old, his small stature and the street Arab ways he assumed at will usually caused the Kid to be regarded more as a boy of sixteen or seventeen than as a young man of twenty-two, which he was in reality. Gauntlett's feeling, when first introduced to the Kid, was one of indignation—"the idea of expecting him to be under the orders of a boy like that." He told Sergeant Boyce that "it was absurd to put him under the command of a mere child," and the officer rather tartly retorted :

"Mr. Gauntlett, you must admit that I'm a better judge than you of the capability of my agents. I would rather you didn't interfere in the matter at all; any mistake on our part might hinder our ever ascertaining who the assassins really were, or what is just as bad, being able to prove our case." So Rob, who really was excessively well got up as a small hawker, eventually promised to take his orders from the "Kid."

"There is only one thing more, sir," said the Sergeant as Gauntlett prepared to set forth in charge of the Kid on his self-imposed vigils, "have a good supply of money about you; what I mean is this, that it might be necessary for you, in case of his bolting, to follow your man to Liverpool or even to America without having the opportunity to cash a cheque."

The Kid had hardly opened his mouth while in

the presence of his superior, but when he found himself in the streets with Gauntlett he observed :

"And so, sir, you're to be my mate in this here job; well, I hopes we shall work together all right. Very good get-up," he continued, critically surveying his companion; "but what's going to be your particular caper?"

"I don't understand what you mean," rejoined Gauntlett.

"Well," rejoined the other, "hawking lead pencils and such-like is a very speculative amusement, no doubt, but it's hardly so profitable as to justify your sticking to one street all day. You see you must have done the street in two or three hours, and then people are wondering what you're hanging about for; besides, you speak too like a toff for a hawker. Now look at me, *I* can hang about a place all day, and nobody wonders about it. What with the crossing, and pretending to run errands, what with calling cabs for those who want 'em, to say nothing of those who don't, what with playing shove-ha'penny and hop-scotch with the other boys, nobody notices me, I've established myself as one of the institutions of the street. Ah!" continued the young imp grinning, "blowed if I couldn't establish quite an honest industry in that street, a thing what the parsons and flanthropists are always talking about."

There could be no doubt that the Kid was an enthusiast in his calling; it suited his mischievous,

somewhat cynical temperament, and having devoted his wits in his earlier years to the evading of the police, he had now developed into one of the best watch-dogs of the Force. He was admirably got up as a street crossing-sweeper, and looked the London *gamin* to the life. There was no special credit due to him for pretending to be what he really had been, but the Kid was vain of his histrionic powers and told with great glee "how only a little before he had been chivied, and finally arrested by the constables on the beat, for 'gambling on the kerb,' and had to show his ticket to procure forgiveness of the offence."

Gauntlett listened without remark. He was turning over in his mind what his companion had said with regard to the hawking business; at last he said:

"You think that I should attract notice, selling these things?"

"Quite certain you will," rejoined the Kid, "people will very soon tumble to the fact that you ain't no hawker."

"Then what am I to do?" asked Gauntlett.

"Don't try to sell 'em," replied his companion, "you must do away with the basket, take half-a-dozen of the pencils in your hand, and come the 'reduced gentleman' dodge, one whose reverses of fortune have brought him to this. Put a lot of 'keind friends and Christian brothers,' into it, talk about a

sick wife, and the sale of these here pencils being your sole means of support, and they'll understand that you're willing to take anything they like to give, but that you're not selling lead pencils; don't you twig? Nobody expects a beggar to move his pitch unless it don't pay; why there's lots of the professionals have kept the same pitch for years, they're like crossings, saleable property. You'll do right enough when you're started, only take my advice, be sparing of the patter to begin with. Shouldn't wonder," thought the Kid, "if he does rather well at first, he'll be so ashamed of begging it'll be worth many a brown to him."

Horace Barnes resided in a small but comfortable house in Cambridge Street, just off the Edgware Road; he had resided there now for some considerable time, and had been much given at one time to putting up a friend or two. This had been when he first established himself there, and his guests were generally men younger than himself, whose acquaintance he had made on the race-course or about town. He would say to these innocents who for the most part were but temporary sojourners in the metropolis, "What's the use of your going to an hotel? only cost you a lot of money, and I've a spare room at my little crib, doing nothing; what's dinner for one is dinner for two, and if you like to send in a dozen of champagne for the good of the house, all right, my boy! I'm not rich

enough to say no, and remember it'll be your own fault if you don't drink the bigger half of it." This genial, hearty, old-fashioned invitation had been accepted by many a neophyte, who after passing a very pleasant time with his host had come to the conclusion before he left Town that Long's or Limmer's would have been comparatively cheap. Mr. Barnes accompanied his friends to theatres and music halls, indeed was a constant habitué of the "musical Tattersall's;" but there were evenings upon which they did not go out, and to wile away these latter, cards were usually introduced. Barnes's dinners were excellent, he was no niggard with his wine, and his luck at play was proverbial; however, he had given all this sort of thing up of late years as too risky, though profitable; his victims seldom returned; they were certain ere long to hear of that little scandal which had prematurely shortened their host's University career, and uncharitably, if not unadvisedly, came to the conclusion that Horace Barnes's hands had not forgotten their former cunning. The last few days, however, he had received another guest, and his housekeeper noticed that he seemed somewhat in awe of the new arrival "The fact is," the good lady remarked to one of her intimates, "master seems downright afraid of this Mr. Shelton, it's not a bit like him either, I used always to think he rather hector'd over the young gentlemen he had to stay with him, but this

one bullies *him*. A hard gentleman, short and rough in his ways. I suspect the master will be pretty glad when he takes his departure."

"Now," said the Kid, when they arrived at the Edgware Road, "that's where our man lives, I might say both of 'em. They tell me you don't know this Shelton by sight, no matter, I'll point him out to you. Ah, you see that's my crossing, I just hire it for so much a week; you'd better go and establish your pitch quite towards the other end of the street, just where it cuts into Connaught Street, and the sooner you commence your little cipher the better. I must just let my pal see I'm here."

"Why, where is he?" enquired Gauntlett.

"In lodgings opposite the house," said the Kid, "by way of being a literary gent employed on the evening papers, and takes the night turn, but no more talk—duty now—there's the house, and mind, not even a cat goes in or out without your knowing all about it," and so saying the Kid threw himself into the business of his crossing, with great zest and alacrity.

Rob Gauntlett wandered down the street to the point suggested by his companion, and then for the first time he realized his self-imposed task was none so easy. The sound of his own voice asking for charity, frightened him, and it seemed to him, that no one could fail to regard him in any other light than that of a thorough begging impostor.

CHAPTER XXII.

JIM LYSTER TURNS COURIER.

IF there was ever a man felt discontented and disconcerted it was old Isaac Martin at the disqualification of Bobadil. It was quite in accordance with the rules of racing, no doubt, but how such a terrible crime could have happened so inopportunately for his interests, puzzled the old man exceedingly; he was sorry for the Squire, who he respected as a thorough upright and straightforward sportsman. It is a mistake to suppose that those who tread tortuous paths cannot admire those who do not deviate from the direct way; as Becky Sharp says "it is so easy to be good on five thousand a year," and Ikey Martin would have said in like manner, "I'd always run straight, if I could afford it." Now he really had this time honestly done the best he could for his employer, to say nothing of having stood to win a very pretty stake for himself, and now victory was changed into defeat, and after all his care and secrecy, he was a good bit out of pocket over the affair. As an historical turf character once remarked after fraudulently landing the Blue Ribbon, "What is the use

of winning the Derby, if they won't let you have it?" and the trainer felt inclined to say "What's the use of running honest, when it all ends in this sort of way?" He had a hazy idea that somebody had got the best of him, and that to Isaac Martin was a very painful conception, still he'd no idea how it had all come about, but, as was natural, he watched everything connected with a murder which had made such a heavy pecuniary difference to himself, with close attention. Like the generality of the public, he supposed that the ostler was the murderer, and that it had been a mere case of robbery, in the first instance, and that the Squire's recognizing his assailant, had led to the latter taking his life. Had he entertained the slightest idea of the suspicions entertained by the police with regard to Horace Barnes, the old trainer would have been still more keenly interested in what was likely to come of the inquiry.

When Henry Curtice heard, as he speedily did from Lyster, that Rob Gauntlett had thrown himself actively into the tracking down of Barnes, and had insisted on taking upon himself the duties of a detective, he was quite as much put out as Scotland Yard had been. He was just at the present moment so terribly hampered by the action of self-constituted detectives at Saxham, that he felt sure that no good would come of it. All the idlers in the village, and there were plenty of people in that

little place who had a good deal of time on their hands, seemed to think it their duty to turn detective, and the fatuous reports with which they were constantly pestering him, and the confusion of time and dates which characterized their various tales of having seen suspicious strangers lingering in the neighbourhood of the village, completely effaced any real clue that might have come to light in that respect. That there had been two strangers down to Saxham a few days preceding the murder, Curtice now thought was pretty clear; that Barnes was one of them he had little doubt, that Shelton was the other was probable; and that if these were the two men, they could be identified when the time came, he felt sure. The waiter at the "Wrexford Arms," was quite certain he could identify the one man, and though people had so far doubted and differed in their description of the stranger who stayed at the "Marquis of Granby," yet when the man was put before them, there would doubtless be several to recognize him.

A weak point in his part of the case was, that neither of these strangers seemed to have been seen in the vicinity on the day of the murder; true the park was half a mile from the village, and there was no necessity to pass through the latter to get to it; also that on an October afternoon there would be few people about the lanes or fields to take note of them; still it was singular that no one resembling

one or both of them should be spoken of as having been seen upon that day. That they would not wish to attract notice would be natural, but then in a retired country village like Saxham a stranger always did attract notice, more especially when he affected the attire of a gentleman ; yet it did seem curious that no one should be able to come forward and recall having noticed one or two such men, stimulated as their memories now were by the knowledge of the terrible crime which had been committed. Then Curtice wondered if the Raven, instigated by these men, and greedy of gold, was not the real murderer, in which case, unless he should choose to confess, it would be difficult to connect Barnes with the crime, whatever suspicion might lie against him as an accessory before the fact. But "No, no" he thought, "Wilkinson and I were quite sure when we examined the spot that morning, that there were two men concerned in it. Dick the ostler is one, but we've yet to bring it home to the other ; somebody must have seen one or both those men on that Tuesday afternoon, and that somebody I've got to find, and by Heaven ! I'll do it."

Curtice had quite enough worry on his hands at present. He was unwearied in managing all the business details for the widow, which his uncle's death had involved, to say nothing of his untiring efforts to find out his assassins. Then again Rose's health was fast becoming a cause of serious un-

easiness. "Take her away," urged Dr. Ridley, "and at once. It is the only thing that can be of real benefit to her. Let her see anyone you like in London, and I'm sure they will only endorse my advice." Curtice felt that the doctor was right, but then how could he be spared from the Grange at present? There were lots of matters to arrange, and then he could not abandon this self-imposed mission of righteous vengeance on which he had embarked. Poor Rob would have been the man to have done it, but then at the present moment the sufferer, on account of her morbid imaginings, could not endure the sight of him. He was dreadfully puzzled what to do about it all. Mrs. Wrexford and Rose were decidedly not fit to go abroad without somebody to look after them. When Henry talked it over with Jenny, she pluckily declared she could manage for them, yet the girl showed traces of the sorrow and anxiety she had already gone through, and it was hardly fair to put this extra burden upon her. Who was there he could trust to take charge of them? There seemed to be no friend or relative of their own to help them. Then the thought of Jim Lyster crossed his mind. Could he ask him? He was, it is true, but a recent acquaintance of theirs, but in a country house people get to know each other very rapidly. Lyster was an idle man, and a thoroughly good-hearted fellow. He had expressed the greatest possible sympathy

with the family in their affliction, and if he could but be induced to take charge of them for some six weeks or so, well then he himself could relieve him. Jim was notoriously staunch to his friends when they came to grief, and surely wouldn't mind giving up a few week's hunting to help him out of his difficulty. At all events he would write and ask him. He could think of no one else, and Lyster had got on excessively well with Mrs. Wrexford and the girls. It might seem a strange request to make, but people under these peculiar circumstances were entitled to seek more than ordinary help from their friends. So by that post a letter was duly despatched to Lyster, asking if he could help in this thing. Jim's answer came by return of post, and contained a ready assent, saying that he was at the disposal of Mrs. Wrexford whenever she thought fit to issue her commands; that he would willingly take charge of them, and act as courier and guardian as long as they liked; that he understood there was no scent, and believed that the hunting was beastly. "While, my dear fellow," he continued, "there is nothing further for me to do here, the little there was I have done, and the remainder is far better left entirely in the hands of the Scotland Yard people. I only hope Gauntlett's well-meaning efforts will not interfere with theirs. I feel sure that you'll agree with me that he'd better not have meddled, but, poor fellow, he is so

utterly miserable about the whole business, and chafes so dreadfully at the idea of doing nothing while you and others, even including myself, are all working to avenge his uncle's death, that I had not the heart to dissuade him from it. It's not likely to happen, but what I do wish with all my heart is that Gauntlett should by some accident play a prominent part in the arrest of these infernal scoundrels, it would be good for him and it might help to remove that unfortunate delusion of Miss Rosie's. I am ready whenever you want me. I suppose I had best meet my charges in London?"

Nothing could be more satisfactory than this letter, and with a running commentary of what a good chap Jim always was, Curtice hastened to communicate its contents to Jenny, but to his surprise that young lady rather demurred. She admitted that it was excessively kind of Mr. Lyster, but added that, for all that, they were hardly justified in taking advantage of it.

"It's very good of him, and he's very sorry for us, no doubt, but still he's not like an old friend. Consider how short a time we've known him. People have been all very kind and nice to us in our great trouble, but to ask Mr. Lyster to give up his hunting and drag three low-spirited women about the Continent with him, is going a little too far."

This notion Curtice stoutly combatted; he urged that Lyster was an idle man, and an old traveller,

and further quoted the contemptuous opinion he had expressed about the hunting just at present.

Jenny pointed out that that was only Mr. Lyster's way of making light of a kindness, in which opinion Curtice perfectly agreed with her, although it did not suit his purpose to admit it. In vain Jenny urged that they would be a very troublesome charge to any man, bidding her cousin bear in mind that they were going abroad for change of scene as much as anything, and that to benefit Rose it meant continual change of scene. "We shall be always on the move, and such restlessness must be a bore to any man, more especially when the trouble of looking for rooms, etc., falls mainly on his shoulders." But it was no use, Curtice adhered pertinaciously to his purpose, and at last wrung from Jenny a reluctant consent that they would trust themselves to Lyster, and go abroad, under his escort, in the course of the next few days.

"You don't think Rose any worse, do you?" he enquired, when this was at length settled.

"No," replied Miss Wrexford, "but I can see exactly what the doctor fears, she's falling into a listless and despondent mood, that's exactly what Doctor Ridley don't like; she wants rousing, and I've great hopes this tour will do that for her. I only hope that Mr. Lyster may not repent of his good nature," she added with a smile, "and come to regret that he ever took charge of us."

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ARREST OF THE BOOKMAKERS.”

SOME days passed by, and Gauntlett was getting more accustomed to his new employment. It was severe discipline for one of his impetuous nature, and he was fain to admit that the monotony and weariness of his days could not have been greater if he had remained in his own chambers, waiting to hear what the police had to tell him. He could not understand the reason of all this weary waiting. Why did not the police arrest Barnes at once? they had plenty of grounds for it, and could easily let him go again if they had made a mistake. He had yet to learn that nothing brings such abuse upon them, and nothing the police dislike more, than the making of a mistake of this description. He had to confess too, that his adopted calling was by no means so easy as he had believed, and when he and his professional colleague made their reports at the end of his first day's duty, he was perfectly astounded at the number of people that had gone in and out of Barnes's door, according to the Kid, that he himself had not noticed. It was true that this was a little theatrical display got up between the Kid and Sergeant Boyce, for his express

benefit, to convince him of his incapacity for the part he was playing, the Kid having reported all sorts of small details which he would not otherwise have done, expressly to astonish the neophyte. He was playing his assumed part as a mendicant certainly with more confidence, but at the same time it went bitterly against the grain, this asking for alms, although he was not a little astonished to find how many pence were put into his hand in the course of the day. There was a horrible tinge of sarcasm too about his adopted rôle; a reduced gentleman he was most assuredly in every sense of the word, bankrupt in love, hope and money. He winced under a jest of the Kid's one evening as they walked home. "Lord, sir," said that precocious young gentleman, "you'd have been blown as an honest 'orker, but you could always earn your living at the lay I've put you on now."

Something to do, yes, his present task once accomplished, and he must set to work about that in earnest; in the meantime he must continue his self-imposed occupation. He never would have undertaken it, had he understood what it meant, now he must go through with it for very shame's sake. What would Curtice, what would any of them say if he drew back now? How he hoped the order to take these men would come soon, and if it only ended in a hand-to-hand fight, well, he would ask nothing better.

One morning, as he and the Kid were walking towards Cambridge Street to take up their respective posts of observation, the latter remarked:

“Our job’s getting near an end, that Barnes means bolting, he does, he suspects he’s watched, he don’t know by whom, but he’s afraid of it. It’s easy to tell when you’ve shadowed as many on ’em as I have, the half glance over the shoulder, the stopping short and turning round suddenly, as if he’d changed his mind and determined to go right in the opposite direction; and when they once begins that game, they’re sure to bolt in two or three days. Blowed if I don’t believe a cove would bolt directly he thought he was shadowed, even if he’d done nothing.”

“Well, what do you mean to do?” inquired Gauntlett.

“I must go strictly by orders,” rejoined the other, “and they are, Don’t take him until you’re told, unless you’re obliged, but mind he don’t slip you. I’ve got the bracelets in my pocket in case I want ’em.”

“Unless the two come out together, of course I remain and watch here.”

“Yes,” replied the Kid, “but my idea is they *won’t* come out together, I think Barnes wants to get away from the other. He funks, t’other don’t; that Shelton’s all for brassing it out, he’s a tough customer, that, and I shouldn’t wonder if he gave trouble when the time comes to run him in.”

A minute or two more and the pair had taken up their allotted stations. The Kid, as usual, was busy with his crossing, and Gauntlett was once more soliciting alms from his "Christian Friends" as a gentleman who, through unmerited misfortunes, had been reduced to selling lead pencils. It was a somewhat foggy November morning—not one of those terrible days on which even experienced Londoners have to acknowledge their inability to find their way, but still quite sufficiently hazy to render it impossible to see any great distance from you, a day upon which it would be very easy to lose sight of a man, and one which made the shadowing of a person extremely difficult in this way, insomuch that he would have to be followed pretty closely, which would of course be likely to attract his attention. So foggy indeed was it, that from the pitch he had taken Gauntlett could only see the door of Barnes's house very indistinctly. A shrill cat-call from the Kid, as preconcerted, made him move towards the Edgware Road as quickly as he dared, and then he saw that Barnes was standing just outside his front door and peering suspiciously up and down the street. Apparently satisfied with his inspection, he walked quickly eastwards; cautiously following, Gauntlett came to the Kid's crossing and found it as he anticipated vacant, and, pocketing his pencils, seized the broom, as had been arranged between them, and

took his place. The prognostications of the Kid were perhaps fulfilling themselves. True, again and again Barnes and Shelton had gone out, and though they had followed them with exemplary patience, nothing had come of it, but as the Kid had truly pointed out, during the few days they had been watching them, the men had invariably gone out together, and it had at last dawned upon the astute Kid that the wretched Barnes was quite as closely watched by his confederate as by themselves. This was what had made the Kid prophesy that morning that they drew near the end of their vigil. He had guessed that for some reason or other Shelton was afraid to let Barnes out of his sight; he surmised that the situation was getting intolerable to the latter, and that he would escape from it on the first convenient opportunity, and as he dogged his man dexterously down Oxford Street, through South Molton Street and across Hanover Square into Regent Street, the Kid made little doubt that the hour had come, and felt that if Barnes displayed a little ingenuity in his endeavour, there would be nothing for it but to take him into custody.

On arriving in Regent Street, Barnes threw a nervous glance over his shoulder, which was immediately detected by the lynx-eyed Kid.

"Ah!" he muttered to himself, "he suspects he's followed, though he hasn't twigged by whom; he's going now to blink his pursuer, I wonder what his

little caper will be. Now for it, my lad, if you let the likes of him throw sand in your eyes you deserve to be kicked."

Barnes's attempt to escape from any followers he might have was simple but transparent, and at once precipitated matters. He turned into the St. James's Hall, and it was at once clear as daylight to the Kid that his intention was to leave by the Piccadilly entrance. Now, habited as he was, the Kid was quite aware that he would not be permitted admission to the fashionable restaurant; it was equally useless for him to watch for the reappearance of a man in Regent Street, who he was quite convinced would come out in Piccadilly. He had no choice left, he must take him then and there, and before Barnes had got a dozen steps inside the Hall, the Kid had bounded forward, seized his victim by the collar, and exclaimed, "I'm a detective officer, and I arrest you, Horace Barnes, for the wilful murder of Thomas Wrexford, at Saxham."

The employés, who were rushing indignantly forward to Barnes's rescue, stopped aghast at these words, while the luckless man himself turned pale as he stammered out: "It's a lie, I never did it, I'll swear Squire Wrexford did not meet his death at my hands." But by this time a policeman had been fetched, the Kid had produced his ticket, which the constable at once acknowledged, and informed the bystanders that the Kid was a plain

clothes officer of the Force, which elicited some disparaging remarks upon the latter's attire, but, backed up by the constable, the Kid had no trouble in securing his prisoner, whom having handcuffed he placed in a four-wheeled cab and at once took off to Vine Street Station, there to remain until he had communicated with Scotland Yard.

Gauntlett, all this time, hung wearily about the crossing, wondering whether anything would happen that would give him active employment; there was nothing of the patience of the Indian on the war trail about him, and this untiring watching of which nothing seemed to come, fretted his highly strung nervous temperament to a degree almost unendurable. One hour, two hours, three hours passed, and still no sign of Shelton; as for the Kid and Barnes, they could not be expected back for an indefinite period; if the Kid was right in his deductions, when he *did* return it might be with the news that he had been compelled to make Barnes a prisoner, in which case Rob concluded that Shelton also would be arrested without further delay. Then the thought flashed across him, what if the latter had already achieved his escape? Their confederate who kept the night watch, had assured them both men were in the house when they relieved him; suppose he had been mistaken, and that when the police came to arrest Shelton they found him gone? All the blame

would fall upon his shoulders. Scotland Yard would say at once that their man had slipped through their fingers during the watch of the amateur. He could bear it no longer, he *must* know whether Shelton was in the house; he would call and offer his lead pencils for sale, beg for a crust of bread, anything in short to determine this point. And now Rob Gauntlett escaped by accident from making a mistake that would certainly have ruined his reputation as an amateur detective for ever. He was about to cross the street and knock at the door of Barnes's house, when it suddenly opened, and the man whose whereabouts he was so anxious to ascertain, stood before him. He wasted no time peering up and down the street, but strode confidently off in the direction of the Edgware Road. There he hailed the first passing hansom, jumped into it, and drove off; to hail another and promise the driver double fare if he never lost sight of the first was the work of a moment to Gauntlett, and it was not long before he discovered he was speeding away to the Euston Station. Gauntlett here recognised the soundness of the advice given him by Sergeant Boyce, namely, to have plenty of money about him. He had no doubt that Shelton was heading for Liverpool, and thither Rob determined to follow him. He never had been able to understand the hesitation of the police about arresting these two, but his mind was made up; to Liver-

pool he would follow *his* man, never losing sight of him, but would not interfere with him; let him attempt to leave the country, and he would give him into custody on his own responsibility.

Arrived at the station, Gauntlett found he was quite right in his surmise; he heard Shelton ask for his ticket, immediately took one for himself to the same destination, and having seen his man get into the train, jumped into the next compartment. Once quietly seated, he began to reflect that his position was a little awkward, he had made up his mind what to do, and he meant to do it. If Shelton attempted to go on board ship at Liverpool, he should at once give him into custody for the murder, and would hold him himself if necessary till the police took charge of him. Now what Scotland Yard or Curtice could bring against this man, he could not say, but he was conscious that, as far as he himself was concerned, all he could say was that Shelton had benefited considerably by the terrible crime that had disqualified Bobadil; but as far as his being concerned in the murder, he had no evidence whatever against him. Still it didn't matter, he felt sure that he was right, and no one concerned in his uncle's death should escape if he could help it. He could bear the suspense no longer. Shelton once in custody, and it would be for Curtice and the police to tell all they knew, they had been keeping him in the dark. Jim

Lyster was the only friend he could trust, and he had gone abroad with Mrs. Wrexford and her daughters, in short, the extreme nervous tension of the last month had reduced Rob Gauntlett to a state of morbid irritability, which made it difficult for him to control himself, essential though it was to the *rôle* he was playing.

On arrival at Liverpool, Shelton drove straight to the “Adelphi Hotel,” closely followed by his “shadow.” Having engaged a bedroom, he went out to buy a portmanteau and a few necessities for his voyage. Gauntlett, having once more safely housed his man, and ascertained that he intended to sail for America in the Cunard steamer which left at two the next day, slipped out with the intention of telegraphing to Scotland Yard, but just outside the hotel he ran against a boy, who at once attracted his attention by his shrill cry of “Evening paper, Arrest of the Saxham murderer, Evening paper.” Rob at once bought one, and there read a sensational paragraph, descriptive of the sudden arrest of Horace Barnes in St. James’s Hall that morning, on the charge of being concerned in the murder of Thomas Wrexford. “The prisoner is said to be one of the largest winners over the late sensational Cæsarewitch. The disqualification of Bobadil was, as our readers doubtless remember, the consequence of this crime.”

This changed Rob’s plans; if Barnes was taken,

there could be no object in further delay. He resolved to give Shelton into custody the next morning, and instead of telegraphing to Scotland Yard, took a cab and drove to the head-quarters of the Liverpool police. There he told his story and, to his surprise, found that he would meet with no difficulty whatever in his purpose.

"You are the very man we want, sir," said the inspector who received him, "they have already telegraphed to us from Town that this man Shelton is 'wanted,' and our instructions are to board every steamer that sails to-morrow. An officer from the Yard will be down by the first train to-morrow, who knows this Shelton perfectly well by sight, but we were rather puzzled how to act until his arrival, as we don't know the fellow at all. But if you'll identify him it's all right."

But although so apparently open and unsuspecting, Shelton was not quite so innocent as he pretended. He did not know he *was* followed, it is true, and had not suspected it till his arrival at the "Adelphi Hotel," but he had casually noticed Gauntlett at Euston Square though he did not recognise him, and when he caught a glimpse of him at the "Adelphi Hotel," it did flash across him that this man might be dogging him. Still, he gave very little heed to that, for he had always anticipated that there might be some difficulty about his embarking from Liverpool; he had ostentatiously given out that he was

sailing by the Cunard steamer, in reality he intended leaving by a boat which sailed much earlier, and the destination of which was not New York, and had it not been for Rob's untiring vigilance, might have successfully carried out his scheme. Gauntlett himself had unwittingly put the Liverpool police completely in the wrong by asserting positively that Shelton was going in the Cunard boat, whereas that worthy trusted the small steamer to which he meant to commit himself would be well down the Mersey before the great Ocean Liner took her departure.

Although he had made every arrangement for Shelton's arrest the next morning, Gauntlett was so terribly afraid that his man should give him the slip that he hardly closed an eye all night. By dint of lavish tipping he had secured a bedroom near enough to Shelton's to enable him to keep a vigilant watch over him. Again and again during that night did he regret that he had not brought the police back with him at once and given Shelton into custody there and then; some foolish fancy of taking him in the very act of embarking had made him put it off till the following day, and now he must abide by the arrangement he himself had made. Early the next morning his attention was aroused by the opening of Shelton's door, and he saw him come out of his room, and descend the stairs; he followed, only to hear him call for his bill and direct the boots to fetch down his port-

manteau and put it in a cab. Rob had taken the precaution of settling his own account over night, and quick as thought, while the boots was fetching the portmanteau, he darted out of the hotel, secured a cab, and taking his seat inside it, awaited the advent of his prey; a few minutes and Shelton appeared, and at once drove off towards the quay from which his steamer was to sail, closely followed by Rob. There were no police about, nobody to interfere with him, and with a porter carrying his luggage he leisurely crossed the gangway, went on board and descended the companion ladder.

Rob only waited till he was out of sight, then jumping from the cab, he hastily scribbled a few lines on the back of his hotel bill, gave it and a sovereign to the driver and told him to go as quickly as he could to the police station. "Give that note to the inspector on duty," he said, "and place yourself under his orders. You'll be well paid for the job, but there's no time to lose, steam's nearly up and they won't be long before they're off." And then Gauntlett dashed across the gangway, while the cabman drove furiously off in compliance with his fare's directions.

Once on board, Rob took up his station; he would give as much time as possible for assistance to come to him, but as soon as he saw any signs of withdrawing the gangway, he would arrest Shelton single-handed, unwarranted though he was in doing

so. Of one thing he was determined, either he took Shelton ashore with him, or he sailed with Shelton. The bustle increased—already the cry was raised of “All for shore.” “Now then, sir,” exclaimed the mate, “all for shore—don’t you hear? You don’t seem to have any one to say good-bye to, you’d best step ashore at once—the gangway will be withdrawn in five minutes.”

Rob cast one anxious look towards the quay, to see if there were any signs of the cab. No, it was not to be seen. As he turned once more to the steamer, in compliance with the mate’s tap on his shoulder, and reiteration of “Now then, sir, all for shore,” his eyes suddenly fell upon Shelton, who just then appeared on deck. Shaking off the mate’s hand, Gauntlett dashed at him, and seizing him by the collar, exclaimed, “I arrest you for murder.” But Shelton was no chicken, he had commenced life in the Prize Ring, and had been well-known as a promising middle-weight, some little time before he turned book-maker; his sole reply was a straight right-hander, which cut Gauntlett’s lip open, and stretched him on the deck. Rob was up in a moment and once more flew at his throat, but this time he himself was on his guard, his hands were up, and he went steadily for his man in orthodox fashion. He was the taller and stronger man of the two, and had been reputed clever with the gloves in his college days, and so taken aback were the

sailors, that before it occurred to them to interfere, a fierce and savage round was fought between the two men; it was the skilled professional against the amateur; and although Shelton's face bore more than one mark, significant of his antagonist's handiwork, a tremendous left-hander at length once more stretched Gauntlett, this time well-nigh senseless, on the deck. By this, the captain had appeared upon the scene, and he at once gave orders that Shelton should retire to his cabin, with the preliminary hint that he would be taken there if he did not do as he was bidden.

"As to the other madman," continued the skipper, "shove him ashore, and then we'll withdraw the gangway," and before Rob had quite recovered himself, he was seized by two or three brawny sailors, and hustled on to the quay. The men dashed back, the gangway was about to be withdrawn, when Rob once more darted across it, while at the same moment a cab dashed up, out of which sprang a police officer, with the peremptory cry of "Stop!" Another second, and he and his mate had both dashed on board, and informed the captain that they had come to arrest Michael Shelton for the Saxham murder, that there was a warrant out against him, and an officer, with it, was already on his way from London.

Now all England was ringing with the Saxham murder, but the captain had not been on deck

when Gauntlett first rushed at his man; when he came upon the scene he fancied it was only an altercation between one of his passengers and some along-shore loafer, in which his passenger seemed to be perfectly able to take care of himself; but as soon as the police apprised him of the real state of the case, he led the officers straight to Shelton's cabin. The minute he opened the door, that worthy saw resistance was useless; and before the gangway was finally withdrawn, Rob had the satisfaction of seeing his truculent foe re-cross it in custody.



CHAPTER XXIV.

"THE TRIAL."

A CRIMINAL *cause célèbre* makes one understand the passion of the Roman ladies for the fierce scenes of the arena; we have been polishing and improving human nature all these thousands of years, and yet it remains about the same as where it started. Our vices and appetites are pretty much what they were then, and to see a fellow-creature battle for his life, whether with the law or the lion, apparently possesses quite as great an attraction as it did in the cruel olden days of which we speak with such horror and contempt. Whenever a great trial for murder

takes place there is barely standing room to be found in our law courts, while the judge who tries it is inundated with petitions for seats on the bench, and, as is well known, the majority of these are by the most fashionable ladies in the land.

Croftstone Assizes for many years back had been constituted a sort of gathering by all the neighbourhood; most of the country gentlemen were on the grand jury, and what more natural than that they should take rooms and bring their wives and daughters with them to share in the gaities of the week? There was the Assize Ball, for instance, which, though not so famous a festival as *the Croftstone Ball par excellence*, was still a very notable and cheery dance. People who knew each other, both old and young, but who lived further apart than could be compassed in an afternoon's drive, met and exchanged ideas, good wishes, etc., while the ladies could always find shopping of some sort—as, indeed, where will they not?—that might be transacted in the old city.

Never had Croftstone been fuller than it was on this occasion, never had the whole country side been so stirred within living memory as by the murder of Thomas Wrexford; and now the prisoner, this Dick, the ostler of the “Marquis of Granby,” in Saxham, and known by the grisly sobriquet of “the Raven,” was to stand at the bar and dree his doom for being the perpetrator of the brutal deed.

All sorts of reports were flying about; the papers had duly signified the arrest of two well-known racing men as accessories to the crime. One, it had already leaked out, had been captured by Rob Gauntlett himself at the last moment, when actually on board ship and about to sail for a foreign clime; the other had been captured in the St. James's Hall, a building with which, from having dined there or having been to see the Christy Minstrels, or some one or other of the numerous concerts and entertainments always going on beneath its roof, was familiar to most people. Then the sensational race at Newmarket, which the public were now quite convinced was mixed up with, and the probable cause of the murder, all combined to make it a case of unusual interest, and one in which thrilling disclosures might be anticipated. It was said, too, that the dead man's nephews would be prominent witnesses for the prosecution, that Mrs. Wrexford was dying from the shock, that pretty Rose Wrexford had gone out of her mind and the doctors expressed little hope of her recovery, that poor Rob Gauntlett, whom they all knew and liked, had been ruined by the foul deed, and that all this misery had been wrought to enable two or three scoundrels to fraudulently obtain a large sum of money.

"Oh! it's all clear enough," said Lord Pentland, a fine though rather arbitrary old nobleman, who

was always excessively authoritative and conspicuously busy, without having anything to do, during the Assizes. "These two racing blackguards subsidised that brute of an ostler to commit the murder. Poor Tom Wrexford! he was too good a fellow to have been done to death that way. I hope to Heavens—I hope they'll hang the whole d——d lot; I'm told that ostler fellow made a clean breast of it this morning."

The peer's language was apt to be as strong as his information was inaccurate.

"You're wrong there, Lord Pentland," exclaimed a young fellow, who just then joined the group which his lordship was haranguing. "I saw Curtice not an hour ago, and he told me the prisoner hadn't opened his lips. The prison authorities, it seemed, had all been expecting he would make full confession. I'll tell you what Jenkinson, one of the shrewdest men on the circuit, told me, 'I'm not behind the scenes,' he said, 'but I don't think they'll get a conviction, though there's good grounds for supposing they've got the right men.'"

Lord Pentland made no reply to this observation. He was wont to regard any controversion of his opinions on the part of his juniors as bumptiousness in the extreme, and subsided into semi-inarticulate growlings to the effect that these expletive lawyers were always splitting straws

about something or other, and that Jenkinson, in particular, was an expletived fool.

When the Raven made his first appearance in the dock Curtice was struck with the expression of the man's face ; it was not until the last moment that he had been informed that Barnes and Shelton were in custody, and would be indicted with himself as accessories to the murder. Curtice's mind was quite made up as to the guilt of the two bookmakers, and he was more anxious to obtain a conviction against them than against the ostler, whom he regarded as their mere tool. Against Shelton, in particular, he was conscious that his case was dreadfully weak. With regard to Barnes it was different, that betting-book he thought was enough to hang him. He held Jenkinson's opinion in much higher respect than Lord Pentland, and had been somewhat discouraged on hearing of the view that eminent counsel had taken ; true Jenkinson, as he said, was not "behind the scenes," there were various little points with which he was unacquainted, such as the discovery of the betting-book, etcetera, still Jenkinson was a lawyer of considerable criminal reputation, formidable alike both in attack and defence, and Curtice half regretted that he was not to be his leader, instead of Mr. Balders, Q.C., the counsel for the Crown. From his knowledge of the details of the affair, Curtice had claimed to act as junior himself. As he had expected, he had found very little

difficulty about identifying the two men; though they had failed to describe him, John Crowder and one or two of his guests were quite certain that Shelton was the man who had spent that festive evening in the bar parlour of the "Marquis of Granby." The postmistress, too, was perfectly certain that was the gentleman who had called for letters and been so curious about the doings of the family at the Grange, while not only the waiter at the "Wrexford Arms," but two or three of the other servants, perfectly remembered Horace Barnes as the gentleman who stayed there much about the same time and left on a Sunday.

It was evident to Curtice during the reading of the indictment by the Clerk of Arraignment, that the Raven recognized both his fellow-prisoners, and regarded them with malignant satisfaction. But as Balders, Q.C., the leading counsel for the prosecution, stood up, Curtice noticed that the Raven's look of hatred was, in the case of Barnes, tempered with something like contempt. To Rob Gauntlett, who was sitting on the bench until such time as he should be required to give evidence, and whose powers of observation had been considerably sharpened by his late detective experiences, the faces of the three men presented a curious study. Barnes, it was evident to everyone, was utterly unnerved by his position, but the Raven's face was more that of one who had fallen into a trap from

which he saw no possibility of escape, mingled with intense satisfaction that the companions of his crime were about to share his fate. Shelton alone looked cool, resolute, and unmoved, like the trapped fox, mute and defiant to the bitter end, whatever it might be.

Barnes and Shelton were defended by counsel, while a local solicitor watched the case on behalf of the Raven.

The prisoners all pleaded "Not Guilty."

Mr. Balders in his opening address to the jury said that they were called upon to investigate the particulars of one of the most atrocious and cold-blooded murders that was ever committed; that he should commence by pointing out and demonstrating to them that the two prisoners, Barnes and Shelton, had come down to Saxham, where they were previously unknown, and where, as far as could be learnt, there was only one conceivable motive that could account for their presence. "I shall prove to you, gentlemen, that one or both of these men were in communication with the third prisoner, Dick the Raven; I shall prove to you that these men had a very large pecuniary interest in a certain horse, called Bobadil, not winning an important race called the Cæsarewitch, at Newmarket. The mysteries of the Turf, like those of the Egyptian goddess, are peculiar, and I regret to say, for the better conducting of the important case entrusted to

me, I am not so conversant with them as could be desired."

A subdued titter here came from the barristers' table, amongst whom it was well known that Mr. Balders, Q.C., was a constant habitu   of the race-course.¹

"We are all aware, gentlemen, that the turf presents many opportunities of fraud to unscrupulous persons and even its most upright, honourable and enthusiastic supporters are, sad to say, compelled to own that amongst the lower ranks of its followers are to be numbered some who, in ordinary parlance, would 'stick at nothing.' The light of public opinion beats fiercely now upon all men who take any prominence amongst their fellows, let the cause be what it may, the press and telegraph bring their deeds vividly before their countrymen, and in such a sporting nation as our own none have their actions more closely scrutinised than the patrons of the turf. You may be aware, gentlemen, that for monetary reasons the favourite for a big race has often been tampered with, not so frequently, I'm glad to say, in these latter days, as was the case years ago. In turf parlance, gentlemen, this is called making a horse 'safe,' but in the annals of the race-course, human audacity and callousness to crime has not before conceived the idea of making a *man* 'safe.'" And here the learned counsel dropped his voice to that impressive

whisper with which he was wont to enchain the attention of a jury, adding, "And such, gentlemen, if I substantiate the story entrusted to my care, is what has been done by the three men standing before you.

"Mr. Robert Gauntlett, I regret to say, for his own sake, is what is denominated a 'plunger,' or very heavy backer of horses. I shall bring him before you presently, and he will tell you that, in a freak, he entered his colt, Bobadil, in his uncle, Thomas Wrexford's name, for the Cæsarewitch; that he backed it to win a very large stake. We shall show you that the defendants, who are professional bookmakers, betted very heavily against his colt, and further, backed another prominent favourite called Plutarch, with which they were connected, to win them a very large sum. In the first place it would seem that they apprehended no danger from Bobadil, but when they awoke to the fact that Mr. Gauntlett's horse would probably beat their own, they seem to have come to the conclusion that must be prevented at all hazards. Well, gentlemen, their first idea was to make overtures to Isaac Martin, Mr. Gauntlett's trainer, to stop the horse—that is, prevent its winning—but finding him incorruptible, they then had the audacity to see if it was possible to bribe Rice, the jockey, to 'pull' the horse. The metaphors of the turf, gentlemen, are copious and peculiar, but to 'stop,' 'pull,' and make a horse 'safe,' I am in-

formed, all bear the like interpretation, that is, prevent his winning. The greed of gold has tempted men to sin from time immemorial, and to what lengths it will lead them the present case unhappily shows. Failing to bribe Rice, a jockey of stainless reputation, who might, as I am told, be described as Rice the incorruptible, they conceived the incredible idea of compassing the death of Thomas Wrexford, the nominator, bear in mind, of Bobadil, and by racing law, gentlemen, remember that the death of a nominator before the race is run, disqualifies the horse, although all bets concerning him still hold good. You see, gentlemen, what an enormous difference the disqualification made to the defendants, a difference probably of many thousand pounds, and one which it is impossible for us to give more than an approximation to.

“They come down to Saxham, where they in quire into the habits of the deceased, and make the acquaintance of Dick the Raven, who, it appears, like themselves, is a bookmaker, though a local one and in a very small way, and holding the position of ostler at the ‘Marquis of Granby.’ This man also was interested in the defeat of Bobadil, having bet against him. Pounds, as we know, gentlemen, represent to some of us what thousands do to others, and I think we shall prove to you that the defendants, Barnes and Shelton, succeeded in bribing the Raven to slay the deceased,

thereby constituting themselves accessories before the fact, which, in the eye of the law, constitutes them principals in the felony. The body of the murdered man was discovered in his own park on Tuesday evening, the night before the race. His watch was missing, and, singularly enough, was discovered by a *child*, in a disused hayloft, which formed part of the premises of the 'Marquis of Granby,' in the occupation of John Crowder. We shall prove to you that the said hayloft was frequented by Dick the Raven, and what my learned friend will doubtless urge in behalf of his client is, that the mere fact of the child having gone up there to play is a proof that the loft was accessible to anyone who chose to go there, and that there is no reason to conclude that the watch was secreted by the accused. Had nothing but the watch been found, gentlemen, I admit that, whatever might be the suspicion against Dick the Raven, there would have been no conclusive proof that he had placed the watch where it was found; but as Mr. Curtice and John Crowder, the landlord of the 'Marquis of Granby,' will tell you, guided by the child, they went to the scene of the discovery, and further investigation brought to light not only a bag containing a considerable quantity of money, but a pocket-book, which we can prove without doubt to be the property of Dick the Raven."

The mention of the pocket-book had a striking

effect upon two out of the three prisoners. To Shelton it meant nothing; he had read in the papers before his arrest of the discovery of a book, but had taken little heed of it; in his mind, it was a matter of small importance, utterly insignificant compared to the discovery of the watch, but with his companions it was different. Barnes's lips twitched nervously when the counsel for the prosecution alluded to it; that it had been found he was perfectly aware, and what a fatal entry against himself was therein recorded, he too sorrowfully remembered; but for all that, when this proof of his blood-guiltiness actually confronted him in the dock, it seemed to assume more terrible proportions than it had hitherto. As for Dick the Raven, he did not, up to this, know that the pocket-book had been found; it may be remembered that a further layer of hay had been placed in the aperture of the loft, between the watch and the other two articles, and up to this the Raven had clung to the belief that nothing but the watch had been found. He knew that this converted suspicion into a certainty, and that as soon as this was proved he would stand convicted in the eyes of the jury of having hidden the watch, of which so far he professed to know nothing. His face changed from the dogged indifference it had assumed after his first fierce glance at his companions, to an aspect of dismay and anxiety, and he appeared at last to realise the

dangerous position in which he stood. He bent forward, and leaning over the front of the dock, muttered a few words to his solicitor, who was seated just below; the latter nodded and replied, "Presently" in an audible whisper, and then, drawing back, the Raven evidently became absorbed in the remainder of Mr. Balders's speech.

CHAPTER XXV.

BARNES TURNS QUEEN'S EVIDENCE.

THE excitement in the Court, as the leading counsel proceeded, grew intense, there were evidently all the particulars of one of the most sensational trials that ever took place. There stood the murderer in the dock, and the instigators of the crime by his side. The position of the dead man and the singular combination of events that had led to his assassination would have been quite sufficient to arouse the greatest interest in the case, but it was known that all sorts of startling revelations might be expected, that the trainer and jockey of Bobadil, and several members of the betting ring had been subpoenaed and would be placed in the witness box; that the circumstances under which Barnes and Shelton had been arrested were, in themselves, of a most unusual character, and that the evidence of both Gauntlett and Curtice would prove startling in

the extreme. Those of the country gentlemen serving on the grand jury, and who in that capacity had had the opportunity of obtaining such insight into the case as to enable them to find "A true bill," declared that it promised to be the most remarkable trial in which they had ever assisted, and the opening speech for the prosecution most thoroughly endorsed their views. Mr. Balders having concluded his oration, the first step taken in the proceedings was to produce evidence that Barnes and Shelton were the two strangers who separately visited Saxham some few days before the murder; this was all simple enough, the witnesses had no trouble in identifying the prisoners. True Mr. John Crowder gave some trouble to Curtice in his capacity of examining counsel, by showing considerable bias in his evidence, by becoming what lawyers invariably dread—a too voluble witness. He was too clearly prejudiced against Shelton and the Raven, not to compel his testimony to be taken with some reserve, and it was mixed up with latest expressions of his own opinion, such as he couldn't believe that "a gentleman of such sporting tastes could be such a bloody-minded villain, nor get over having cherished a murderer in his bosom, that is his stable-yard;" and was with difficulty curbed by the judge from yet further expression of his sentiments.

Still, the cross-examination failed to shake the evidence in the slightest degree, and that Barnes

and Shelton were the strangers at Saxham was incontestably proven.

The search for the missing man and the discovery of his body was then described by Curtice, Wilkinson and others engaged in it. John Crowder was recalled, and with his grandson and Curtice, told the story of the discovery of the missing watch, to which the Court listened with breathless interest, culminating with the further discovery of the bag of money and pocket-book. That fatal bet of one hundred pounds to one on Bobadil for the Cæsarewitch, was duly read out, with the name of Horace Barnes written at the foot of it, and commented on by Balders, as "odds so unheard of in the history of racing, as to make it quite conclusive that such a bet could only have been laid for some hidden and ulterior purpose," and to the deeply stirred audience it seemed as if the deadly folds of the law were fast closing around two of the unhappy men in the dock. Against Shelton, so far, there really seemed no evidence further than that he had been seen in Saxham some few days before the murder. But when Gauntlett appeared in the witness-box and told the whole story of the race, of the very large sum he stood to win over it, of how by his uncle's death his horse Bobadil was disqualified, and how, with the assistance of the Liverpool police, he had arrested Shelton in the very act of flying the

country; when his commissioner and other leading members of the betting fraternity proved that Barnes and Shelton were two of the largest winners over the Cæsarewitch, consequent on the way it was eventually decided, owing to the untimely death of Mr. Wrexford, the closely packed audience was strongly impressed with the belief that Shelton was as much concerned in the crime as the other two. Indeed, when the Court rose, that afternoon, there could be no doubt popular opinion ran high against all three prisoners.

Still the critical Jenkinson boldly expressed his opinion that though things were looking somewhat black for both the Raven and Barnes, the prosecution had as yet failed to produce any evidence worth considering as regards Shelton. "You can't put a man down as a murderer," he said, "simply because he won a large sum of money over a race, and if he hadn't tried to leave England at an unlucky moment for himself, I really can't see any grounds for even *suspecting* him of being concerned in it; no jury would give what promises to be a hanging verdict, on such very slender testimony as there is against him as yet. Ah, well! We'll see what to-morrow brings forth."

When the Court met the next morning, it was at once apparent to the initiated that something very important had taken place during the adjournment. What it was, had not as yet

transpired to the great body of spectators, but they were not destined to be kept long in suspense. It was soon authoritatively announced that the prisoner Barnes had turned Queen's evidence, and that the prosecution would take an early opportunity of putting him in the witness-box. It was said his confession was most complete, and that the whole story of the crime would now be unfolded from beginning to end.

"Well, that makes one thing evident," said Jenkinson the critical, "that Dick the Raven is the actual murderer, and Barnes an accessory before the fact. He doesn't look of the stuff of which murderers are made; much more in his way to get somebody to do it for him. Of course, if he had been the actual perpetrator, they couldn't have allowed him to turn Queen's evidence."

No sooner had the two prisoners taken their places in the dock, than the absence of their companion told them at once what had happened; a contemptuous scowl was on both men's faces; both looked anxious, and as Barnes took his place in the witness-box, both shot looks of the fiercest hatred at the man who proposed to save his own miserable life at their expense.

There was no need for the ushers to proclaim silence, the buzz of conversation was hushed, the spectators of the strange drama awaited with breathless silence what Horace Barnes was about

to tell them. At first he was so pitiably nervous that the story could be drawn from his lips only by slow degrees, but there could be little doubt that the man's account of the crime was being unfolded without reserve. He deposed how, in the first instance, he had commenced his book on the Cæsarewitch by betting ten thousand to a thousand against Martin's lot, in which he had no idea that Bobadil was included; he had no notion at the time that the horse was the property of Mr. Gauntlett; it was entered as Mr. Wrexford's, and any one of his brethren might have been deceived in the same way he had been himself. Not knowing that he had already bet against the horse, he was induced to bet heavily still further against him; he acknowledged to owning a share in Plutarch, to having backed that horse very heavily for the race, and, in conjunction with his confederates, having won a very large sum over it. A few days previous to the decision of the Great Handicap he became aware that Bobadil was the property of Mr. Gauntlett, that the horse had won a tremendous trial, and that his owner and his friends were wonderfully confident and were backing Bobadil as if the race was already over. To him this meant ruin, he was playing for the biggest stake he had ever done in his life, and Bobadil's victory would prove simply his destruction. He admitted that he and his confederates had endeavoured to tamper with the

trainer, and even gone the length of making overtures, as far as they dared, to Rice, the jockey. In both cases they were unsuccessful, and from all he could gather, Bobadil was likely to beat Plutarch—that the race, at all events, lay between them. In an evil moment for himself and everyone concerned he consulted the defendant, Shelton. For reasons of his own Shelton had been down to Saxham, and found out all about the habits of the Squire, and had made the acquaintance of Dick the Raven. The Raven was a bookmaker on a small scale, very anxious to acquire capital with which to extend his operations, and, in Shelton's opinion, not likely to let a man's life stand between him and a hundred pounds.

He and Shelton had been partners in large betting transactions previously. On this occasion he was acting quite independently of him, nor did Shelton know quite what he was doing. In his perplexity he made a clean breast of the state of things to his old confederate, told him of the immense stake he stood to win, and that immediate ruin stared him in the face should Bobadil win. He further confessed that all attempts to "square" either trainer or jockey had failed, and that he was at his wits' end to know what to do. To talk the thing over they adjourned to a tavern in the Strand, and then, as a condition to giving his advice and assistance, Shelton claimed to share in the great gains which

would be obtained by Plutarch's victory, and when the agreement was concluded said, "As you have failed to 'get at' either the trainer or the jockey there is only one thing left for, we must 'get at' the man," and then for the first time the murder of Mr. Wrexford was suggested. A thrill of horror ran through the Court, as the wretched Barnes avowed the cold-blooded conception of the crime. The spectators speedily suppressed their feelings, and listened once more in breathless silence to the continuance of the story.

"In pursuance of this plan," continued Barnes, "I went down to Saxham, where I made the acquaintance of Dick the Raven, and laid him the preposterous bet to which my signature is appended. I plead guilty to what I meant by it; there was no doubt that it was the price of Mr. Wrexford's life that I was offering. Shelton's words were always ringing in my ears, that this Dick the ostler was 'not one to let a man's life stand between him and a hundred pounds,' and when I left Saxham there was only one thought in my mind, that I'd stop Bobadil's winning at all hazards. I thought Dick the Raven understood what I meant as clearly as I did myself, but since I have been lying in gaol and thinking over this matter it has occurred to me that it was quite possible he did not; he was avowedly a small bookmaker, and such preposterous odds as a hundred to one 'on' were worth taking about

anything connected with horse-racing. At all events, as I hope to be saved——”

There was a slight murmur in the Court, and “the snivelling cur,” broke in muttered tones from Jenkinson’s lips.

“As I hope to be saved,” reiterated Barnes, “and it’s the truth I’m telling, Dick the Raven had nothing to do with the murder, nor do I know how the watch came into his possession.”

There was an immense sensation in the court at this unexpected statement on the part of Barnes. Everything so far had pointed to the Raven being the actual murderer, and even Sergeant Boyce, who was present in the body of the court, had never doubted of late that the Raven was inculpated in the crime. Now, if Barnes was to be believed, it was possible that he was not mixed up in it, yet how were they to account for his possession of the watch? Even Jenkinson confessed that the case had now taken a most startling and unexpected turn, and then once more the Court composed itself to listen to the conclusion of Barnes’s history.

He went on to say that, as the day drew near, and he heard nothing of the intended crime, and had no tidings from the Raven, he got so anxious about the result that, urged by Shelton, he at last determined to go down to Saxham and judge how things were going for himself. Tuesday morning came and still neither paper, letter or telegram

brought intelligence that anything had happened to Squire Wrexford; he was so nervous and flustered, that Shelton determined to accompany him, and as they neared the village, Shelton said to him: "I'll not miss such a stake as this, on any shilly-shally scruples; if the Raven has played us false, we must do it ourselves—if we get the chance." They had not got out at the usual station for Saxham, but at a small one preceding it, and had walked the five or six miles required to bring them to their destination. Avoiding the village, they had made their way across the fields to the park, and had lain concealed amongst the bracken, till they saw the Squire walking back to the Grange from the Paddocks. They then walked up to him, bid him "good evening," and he, Barnes, asked him the time; while the Squire was looking at his watch, Shelton struck him a tremendous blow with a loaded stick which stretched him senseless on the grass. Shelton then struck him three or four more heavy blows on the head, and they then came to the conclusion that he was dead, and lifting up the body, hid it in the clump of trees where it was afterwards found, hoping by so doing to delay the discovery of the murder some few hours longer; that they went back as they had come, making their way to London that night and getting back to Newmarket by the first train the next morning. Once more protesting that Dick the Raven had nothing to do with

the murder, Barnes brought his confession to a close.

The Court then adjourned for luncheon.

"What a precious pair of scoundrels," said Rob Gauntlett, as he and Curtice met to snatch a hurried mouthful of some sort, "if we hadn't laid hands on the pair of them, they would have left that wretched ostler to die for a crime he never committed."

"I confess I am puzzled," replied Curtice; "how did he get hold of the watch? he *must* explain that, remember it was gone when we found the body; and even supposing it had been dropped in the struggle, so carefully as the ground was searched the next morning it is difficult to believe it would not have been found; he has hitherto maintained he 'knoa'd nothing about it.' Granted he had no hand in the murder, he knew of it before we did, as we shall find before the case is over."

On the Court reassembling, Sergeant Boyce appeared in the witness box, and briefly detailed how on the day of the murder he had ascertained that Barnes and Shelton left Newmarket for London by an early train. In London they were lost sight of, nor had they been able to procure any evidence of their proceeding to Saxham, or having actually been there, and this it was evident would have constituted one of the strong points of the defence, had it not been for the confession of Barnes. The Kid followed his chief into the box, and told

how he had been ordered with others to watch Barnes and Shelton night and day ; how, for fear of his escaping him, he had at last taken him into custody at the St. James's Hall, and great was the astonishment of Gauntlett, to recognise, in the quiet youthful police officer who gave his evidence so clearly and briefly, the *gamin* companion of those weary days of watching. Then came the defence. The advocate of Shelton made the best he could of a hopelessly bad case, dwelling strongly on the fact that the chief evidence against him was his presumed accomplice in the crime, whose words were tainted, and whose testimony required considerable corroboration before any reliance could be placed upon it. And then the interest in the trial culminated, as the solicitor who represented Dick the Raven rose with a paper in his hand, and said that though one of the two prisoners had virtually exculpated his client from being in any way concerned in the crime, he would now read to the Court his client's account of the events of that evening. He must preface it by saying that Dick the Raven was a man greedy of money, and who believed that if he could only amass a small capital to begin with, he could make his fortune as a bookmaker ; that he took the extraordinary bet offered him by Barnes, as any man of that class would, knowing that there were no such odds as a hundred to one on any horse that ran for a race. " And now, gentlemen,"

he said, "I'll read to you my client's statement of what occurred to him that night, and after that I may fairly ask the gentlemen of the jury to acquit Dick the Raven of any previous knowledge of, or connection with the actual murder."

The Raven's story was as follows:—

He had no idea at the time it was made, of its being anything more than a ridiculous bet, and one which only the veriest greenhorn would have proposed, and yet he admitted Barnes did not at all give him the impression of being that. As Bobadil got a hotter and hotter favourite, he kept turning the thing over in his mind; he recollected the strange remarks made by one or both of them about the Squire's health, and the uncertainty of his life, and slowly it began to dawn upon him that perhaps these men meant some harm to the Squire, or were very anxious about his health for some unknown reason. One hundred pounds was a very large sum for him to win, and he got restless and excited about it. He knew that if anything happened to the Squire Bobadil would be disqualified for the race; a vague, uneasy feeling possessed him, and he resolved on the Tuesday night to walk up to the Grange and enquire of some of the men about the stables if the Squire was still at home and in his usual health? As he was crossing the park, he saw two men come from the clump of trees in which the Squire's body was afterwards

found, and hurry towards the park gates, he slunk back behind a tree which he happened to be near, and the two men passed him at some little distance, but it was so dusk that he was unable to identify them. He then proceeded to the clump of trees, and there discovered the Squire lying dead; his watch had fallen out of his waistcoat, and was hanging loose by the chain, and in an evil moment, he detached the watch and put it in his pocket, and then started back towards the village, intending to give the alarm and fetch the policeman. On the way, he found to his dismay that both his hand and coat-sleeve were stained with blood, and by the time he got close to the "Marquis of Granby," he remembered that he had the dead man's watch in his pocket, and was suddenly struck with terror at the idea that he might be charged with the murder. This thought so possessed him that he resolved to say nothing, but leave the discovery of the crime to chance, and diving into the stable-yard, proceeded at once to hide the watch where it was found, and then rid himself of the blood-stains on his hand and coat. After he was taken into custody, he was afraid to tell what he knew, until he saw some prospect of substantiating it.

Mr. Balders contented himself with a brief reply, and the summing up of the judge was dead against Barnes and Shelton. With regard to Dick the Raven, he pointed out that by his own account he

was guilty of felony, and that, except for the testimony of Barnes, he would have found it extremely difficult to clear himself from the graver charge, but there was certainly no reason to suppose that Barnes had not told the truth as far as Dick the Raven was concerned.

The jury then retired, returning into Court in less than an hour with a verdict of "Guilty" against Barnes and Shelton. After briefly addressing the prisoners on the heinousness of their crime, the judge assumed the black cap, and proceeded to pass sentence of death upon Shelton in the usual form, but, in consideration of his having turned Queen's evidence, Barnes was only condemned to penal servitude for the remainder of "his natural life."



CHAPTER XXVI.

"PARTNERS FOR AYE."

THAT everything connected with the trial should be perused by the little party travelling in Switzerland under the auspices of Lyster, was only natural.

The widow and her daughters listened eagerly as Jim read out to them every scrap of intelligence he could gather from the English papers; there was no need now to accuse Rose of morbid listlessness, the pure, bracing air of the Swiss mountains, had restrung her nerves, and restored her whole physical

tone to a healthy condition, and the excitement of the trial had effectually roused her from that state of languid indifference that had so alarmed Dr. Ridley. The three women hung with rapt attention on Lyster's words, as he waded through every incident of that extraordinary trial at Croftstone; they wept as they listened, and the tears of Mrs. Wrexford and Rosie flowed freely at the constant allusions to the barbarous nature of the crime, while in spite of her greater control the tear-drops hung upon Jenny's lashes, as she listened to the details of the awful death of the father she had loved so well. When they came to the narrative of Rob Gauntlett's part of the whole transaction, of his self-imposed duties as a detective, of his pursuit and desperate battle with Shelton before he was duly captured, Rose's eyes flashed through the tear-drops, and she exclaimed:

"Poor Rob! it was like him, bravely done, ever rash, ever careless of himself."

"Yes," said Lyster gravely, "if ever a man strove to make atonement for the mischief he had caused by an innocent whim, it was poor Rob Gauntlett."

Jim, indeed, was doing his new friend good service; he had now countless opportunities of talking the whole affair over with all three ladies, and the cool judgment and clear common sense which lay beneath his indolent manner were making their way as they invariably did with those who came

to know him well. He never missed a chance of exonerating Rob from all blame, and pointing out that such a referring back to first causes might lead to making any of us guilty of the death of those nearest and dearest to us ; and that even if you asked anyone to dinner, and a carriage accident on their way proved fatal, their death might be laid at your door. At first, Rosie would leave the room, and refuse to listen, and Jenny really would be the only one of the trio who would hear his arguments patiently ; but Jim was not to be denied, he returned to the point with untiring pertinacity, and gradually, as his influence over his fair travelling companions increased, Rose would listen with composure to all he might say on the subject, and though she would indignantly refuse to acknowledge that her original resolution was in the slightest degree altered, that all was of necessity over between her and her cousin, and that they must never meet again, yet she would listen compassionately while Lyster dwelt on Rob Gauntlett's good qualities, and argued, that though he had been young and foolish, and unluckily taken up with a lot of gambling companions, still there was plenty of grit and common sense in Rob, and the shock of the late events had steadied him for life.

Now, it occurred to Lyster that he was holding a weakish brief, for, whatever the future might prove, Rob's career up to the present gave very little

signs of steadiness or prudence. He was, no doubt, excessively sick of the turf and "plunging" just now, and, Lyster firmly believed, might be trusted to abstain from both betting and racing in the future. But the old adage is marvellously true, "When the devil is sick, the devil a monk would be." We all know these spasms are apt to be brief if severe, and Rob's reformation was a thing still to be proven. That, the trial once concluded, the papers should teem with articles concerning him, and that some of these articles should comment with great severity on the immorality of the turf, was only what might be expected; which, of course, was just as reasonable as saying that no one should ever take a glass of wine because a small percentage of our fellows are habitual drunkards, or a quiet rubber should never be indulged in, because a few amongst us play baccarat for hundreds. Racing is a grand sport, and no more necessitates gambling than any other; men can gamble about anything, and have from all time, if not in one way, then in another. The vice is hydra-headed, as you suppress it in one form, it springs up in another, and there is no record of any legislation on the subject having achieved more than altering the phase under which it is carried on.

If Jim Lyster had been favourably impressed with Jenny Wrexford, on his visit to The Grange, he was still more astonished, now he saw so much

more of her, at Curtice's indifference to his cousin's charms. She would have been such an excellent match for him, and was altogether so pretty and charming, that Lyster could not conceive, with all the opportunities he enjoyed, how it was that Curtice had not done his best to win Jenny for a wife ; and yet, though he had watched them narrowly during the Croftstone Ball week, he had detected nothing but the most placid cousinly relations between the pair. Curtice had never hinted to him that he had any serious intentions with regard to his cousin during that week, and, a reserved man though Henry was, Jim thought he would have done so had it been the case. Lyster had left before Henry had dared his fate and failed ; and, as it happened, had never met Curtice since, though, even if he had, it is doubtful if he would have taken Jim into his confidence. Men like Curtice are not given to proclaim disasters of that nature, even to their intimates ; and besides, it must be remembered, Curtice had declined to take Jenny's answer as final. Jenny might not acknowledge it to herself, but already there was a tacit understanding growing up between these two, which promised speedily to develop into something more than mutual regard. As to Lyster, in that self-communing which is the usual accompaniment to a man's morning toilet, he made no disguise that he was falling in love, and was already

speculating as to how he should do as a married man. As it was, nothing but the affliction into which the whole family had been plunged prevented him from speaking out; had he known of Curtice's hopes and aspirations, loyalty to his friend would probably have kept him silent; but, as he knew nothing of them, he came leisurely to the determination that if he did not return to England as an engaged man, it should be from no fault of his own.

It seemed a pity to cut short their stay abroad; perpetual change of scene, and the bracing air of Switzerland, had done them all good, and there seemed nothing particular to call them home. Curtice had told them, frankly, now that the trial was over, there would be no great call upon his time, and he could manage everything that was necessary at the Grange, quite easily, and that there was no necessity to turn their faces homewards until they felt inclined to do so. The man at this period most to be pitied was Rob Gauntlett; the excitement of the trial was over, and the reaction had set in; and as he thought of his lost love, his shattered fortune, and what he was to do with his life, he sank into the deepest dejection. He had nobody, just now, in whom to confide his doubts and difficulties; he and Curtice were very good friends, but, as Rob had said, gaily, before his troubles came upon him, "There was always a little too much of the good boy about Henry to induce a

reprobate like himself to seek counsel of him." It was not that Curtice had been preaching, he would have given Rob good advice, and as much sympathy as it was possible for a man to feel for weaknesses foreign to his own nature; but poor Rob felt that Henry's career was somewhat a reproach to his own; the skilful way in which Curtice had done his work in the great murder case had attracted much attention in the profession, and Henry himself felt that he had at last achieved a fair start in that career in which those who knew him best had all along prognosticated his success.

That Lyster should hear frequently from Gauntlett, with anxious inquiries about the health of his fair charges, was obvious; and Jim could not but feel sorry, as he noticed the tinge of hopeless dejection that pervaded them. He was reading bits of one one day to Jenny, and commenting upon them.

"It's rough on him, poor chap," he observed; "it don't matter much whether a fellow's ruined by his own folly or by sheer misfortune, they don't like it—who would? but I tell you what, Miss Wrexford, when they're Rob's age, it shows i. there's any stuff in 'em. He'll do all right, never fear, if your sister hasn't taken the heart out of him."

"You know I regret the mistaken view she has taken, but were it otherwise, it would make no difference; how can they marry? He is ruined."

"I don't think that would make much difference

to a girl who really cared for a man," said Jim slowly, "she'd stick to him, and hope that things would come right, besides, when Gauntlett's affairs are thoroughly looked into, I daresay things won't be quite so bad as we think. If your mother chose to help, I don't doubt that he could make up quite a sufficient income, but what's the use of talking, while neither she nor Rose will even see him?"

"I shouldn't wonder if they do, after a bit. You think a girl ought to cling to her lover, even though he is ruined?"

"I should have an uncommon poor opinion of one who didn't, and so would you," was the reply.

"Never mind me," returned Miss Wrexford, "you must think very badly of Rose, then."

"I should, only her great sorrow has quite upset her judgment at present; when she's got over it a bit, we shall see what she'll do."

"I don't see how anyone can take that view of her conduct," replied Jenny indignantly. "Surely our poor father's last wish justifies her in breaking her engagement with a gambler, even if she hadn't taken up that other idea."

"Excuse me," rejoined Jim, "the Squire was willing to give Gauntlett another chance; if she loves him, she will wait to see if he still is a gambler. I tell you I honestly believe poor Gauntlett's had such a lesson that he'll never transgress

in that way again. I think you're all very hard upon him in his misery."

"Poor Rob! I'm sure I'm very sorry for him," said Jenny gently. "I fancy Rose is gradually getting over that morbid notion of hers, and she really is very fond of him; even at her worst she would sob bitterly over the cruel fate that had parted them for ever."

"Then I venture to prophesy that things will all come straight in the end. I'm a stupid fellow, naturally, and hate trouble; I don't know much about anything, but I've been knocking about the world, my own master, ever since I was nineteen, and I do understand men—instinct, I suppose—but I know the right sort and the wrong 'uns, when I meet 'em, at once. Now, Miss Wrexford, I'm Gauntlett's backer in this business; I hope you will be on our side and help to bring this marriage about."

"I will do my best to induce mamma and Rose to see him again as soon as possible."

"That'll do," said Lyster, somewhat excitedly, "tell them they ought to forgive him, and all that sort of thing, proper feeling, heart bowed down, you know, and then leave human nature to do the rest. I've great faith in human nature."

"Oh, Mr. Lyster, you're a wretched conspirator; faith in human nature, indeed, you're shewing an utter want of it; tell Rose and mamma all that

sort of thing? No, no, if we can only induce them to see Rob, human nature will tell them what to say."

"Well," rejoined Lyster, somewhat abashed, "I never tried my hand at match-making before; as Artemus Ward would say, 'I guess it's not my forte,' I'll not try it again."

"You'll have to once more, you know," said the girl, laughing.

"Yes, of course; by Jove! why not at once? Miss Wrexford—Jenny, I mean—you know—you *must* know, because women always do, you know, that you've been growing dearer and dearer to me every day of late, can you love me well enough to take me for your partner for life? Will you promise to be my wife?"

Jenny hesitated a moment, and then, stretching out her hand, softly whispered, "Yes. Partners in conspiracy now, and partners for aye afterwards, if you will."

It must be admitted that Jim Lyster hardly sustained his reputation for *aplomb* on this occasion.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ROSE BEGS FORGIVENESS.

LYSTER and Jenny agreed between them that, under the circumstances, their engagement had better not be publicly announced. It was settled that Mrs. Wrexford and Rose should be at once apprised of what had taken place, indeed, as Jim pointed out, it was necessary that Mrs. Wrexford should give her formal assent to the arrangement, but that it would be time enough to publish it to the world when they returned to England. Jenny felt sorry for Henry Curtice, for she recognised that he was very much in earnest in that love he had professed for her, still she had nothing to blame herself about in the matter. She had refused him firmly and decidedly, and respected his secret, not even now did she tell Lyster that Curtice had ever asked her to be his wife, and yet she felt, though he had no grounds for it, Curtice would feel aggrieved at her having engaged herself to the friend he had sent in charge of her. It would have made no difference to his own chance, for Jenny was not a girl who did not know her own mind; hers was a very definite "No," with no

probability of its ever changing to "Yes," as is sometimes the case, but she feared that Curtice might feel that there was something like treachery in his friend having supplanted him, and she did not wish that, for Curtice had been very true and staunch to them all in their trouble.

Rose's astonishment was great when Jenny informed her of her engagement. Quick though she usually was to notice anything of that nature, she had never dreamt of there being anything between her quiet sister and Mr. Lyster. She had regarded Jim as not a marrying man, which was a light in which Jim's friends and intimates were accustomed to regard him.

"He's very nice, you know, Jenny, and I'm sure I wish you joy with all my heart, but you know I never thought of him in that way, I shall take a few days to get used to him as a brother. I always liked him for the way he spoke of poor Rob. Ah, Jenny! I used to think I should be married before you, although you *were* the elder, but it would be weary waiting for me now, I shall live with mamma till the end comes, and I feel somehow as if it wouldn't be very long."

This young person, in her present frame of mind, was rather given to arranging her own obsequies, and fixing an early period for her own decease. The feeling is common enough in our young days when the world runs askew, and we take things

harder than we do as we grow older, but it is a comfort to think that most of these martyrs live to find themselves mistaken, and that the salt has not as yet all gone out of their lives. Whether life is worth living is an idle question; the fact remains that we have to live it, and however hard their lot, the vast majority of mankind, swayed let us hope by a stern sense of morality, are loth to exchange the gift of the Creator for a plunge into the Infinite.

Although she asked no questions about him, it soon became evident to the lovers that Rose took the greatest interest in everything that related to Rob Gauntlett. When they discussed his precarious prospects, and what was to become of him, a gratified smile was visible on her face, and whenever Lyster dogmatically asserted his own opinion. "There's grit at the bottom of him, and now he's got over his gambling mania, he'll show there is," the two conspirators became more sanguine than ever as they watched her that all would come right in the end.

At length their faces were turned homewards, and it was wonderful what Dr. Ridley's prescription had done for them all, especially for Rose. All the excitability and morbid depression that had so frightened her medical attendant had disappeared, and though her high spirits had departed, and she was much changed from the laughing girl of a few

months ago, yet she could speak calmly of her father's sad end and all the sorrow that had befallen them, and never alluded now to that miserable and mistaken idea that Rob Gauntlett was the cause of all. On their arrival in England they at once proceeded to Saxham, and there Mrs. Wrexford told Curtice the news of Jenny's engagement. To say it was not a cruel disappointment would be idle, but the rejected wooer took it like a man, and at once made his cousin a pretty little speech about it, saying that she well knew he had hoped it might have been otherwise, but as that was not to be, he most sincerely congratulated her on having won the love of one of the best fellows he knew, and one to whom, as he must resign her, he would sooner give her than anyone else.

"You must forgive my being at the wedding, Jenny. It's weak and foolish of me, I know, but my heart had been very set upon this thing, and though you gave me no reason to expect anything different, still it's a bitter disappointment just at first. I think you'd better let Jim know what happened between us, or else he might ask me to be his best man, and I couldn't stand that."

"You will soon forget your foolish fancy for me, and find someone who will make you a better wife than I should have done. But we shall remain good friends and good cousins I hope always."

"Yes, firm friends always," he rejoined sadly.

"And now I shall wish you good-bye for a time. I've lots of work to do, and feel I must take it out of myself in some way."

A warm pressure of the hand and he was gone.

Although Lyster passed a good deal of his time at Saxham, his headquarters were still in London, and there, as was to be expected, he saw a good deal of Rob Gauntlett. He had endless talks over what the latter's future would be ; cattle ranching in the far West, and divers other schemes, were duly discussed and considered between them, but, as Lyster had anticipated, Gauntlett was very anxious to shake hands with his aunt and cousin before he left the country, for, on whatever calling he might eventually decide, it seemed to them both it was best he should leave England for a time. His agent too strongly favoured this idea, but said that, though sadly curtailed, if Gauntlett could give the property five years to recover, that he, Gauntlett, would find himself considerably better off than he anticipated. Lyster, too, thought that the time was quite ripe for the consummation of his little plot, and it was agreed between them that he should do his best to bring about this interview. Jenny was accordingly instructed to open negotiations with her mother and sister, and to her astonishment found that what opposition there was came from Mrs. Wrexford and not Rose.

"Mama is only a little nervous," said Jenny,

when reporting progress to her lover. "She dreads a painful scene. I shall talk her over in a day or two. I confess I don't quite understand Rose. She assented at once, but made no comment either one way or the other."

"I tell you what, Jenny," said Lyster, "we must manage to let those two have a quarter of an hour to themselves, before your mother sees Gauntlett. We can easily arrange it, and then if things don't come right——"

"Well, sir?"

"Suppose the conspiracy has failed," concluded Jim, rather vaguely.

"And its time to conspire again," said Jenny, laughing. "I want to make Rosie as happy as I am, and I'll do it."

In obedience to a summons from Lyster, Gauntlett arrived at Saxham the next morning, and was at once ushered into the library, where he was rather disconcerted to find nobody. He knew nothing was likely to come of this farewell. Even if she would, he was in no position to ask the girl to marry him now, and how could he ask a pretty, well-dowered girl to wait six or seven years, while he retrieved his shattered fortunes. No, he could only ask her to wish him "God speed," forgive him for all the evil he had inadvertently wrought, and think as kindly of him as she could in the future. Suddenly the door opened noiselessly, and a slight,

mignon figure, clad in sombre draperies, stood motionless on the threshold. It was only for a second. There was a rush of footsteps, and, as Rob raised his head, a pair of arms were thrown round his neck, and Rosie, sobbing on his bosom, faltered out :

“Oh, my love, my darling, forgive me. I was mad. I’ve been saying wicked things about you. I said I would never see you again, but oh, Rob! I didn’t know what I was saying. I could not give you up. I said you killed poor papa—you, who would have died to save him. Oh, Rob! forgive and say you still love me.”

This was a change of front with a vengeance; instead of pleading for pardon, Gauntlett found his accuser herself a suppliant for his clemency. He rose promptly to the occasion, and bestowed his forgiveness, which perhaps was interspersed with more kisses than were absolutely requisite; and when Mrs. Wrexford, discreetly piloted by Jenny, made her appearance a little later, she found, as her daughter put it, that “there was nothing for it but to kiss and make friends all round.” Rob had always been a favourite with his aunt, the hallucination that she had caught in the first instance from Rosie was now entirely dissipated, she required but little persuasion to be reconciled to her nephew, and she knew, moreover, how very earnest the girl’s love for him really was. She cried

a little at the recollection of her sad loss, and then honestly wished that they might be very happy together. But the follies of our lives are not quite so easily atoned for, and, the first rush of his new-found happiness over, Gauntlett had to point out that though his heart was Rosie's for life, yet that he would be in no position to claim her hand for a long time.

"I came only to beg your forgiveness, and to ask you to give me a kindly farewell before I left England——"

"Oh, Rob, Rob!" interrupted the girl, "it was I who needed all your forgiveness, for all the wicked things I have said about you."

"Thanks to my own madness," continued Gauntlett, as he pressed the little hand that rested in his own, "I'm not able now to offer you a home; when I have retrieved my fortunes, if you're still free, I will ask you to share them, but it would be mean to ask you to bind yourself to me now."

"Bind myself," cried the girl, "you can't suppose I'd ever marry anyone but you."

"If you wait long enough, Rosie, don't be afraid but what I will come for you," he replied fondly, "but I must leave you now, all my friends will tell you it is best so. And Aunt," he continued in a low tone, "I should like to honestly serve the probation that *he* laid upon me, and prove to you that I am no longer a gambler."

Lyster, while warmly congratulating Rob on the happy termination of his love affair, strongly advised him to stick to his resolution. "You're better out of the way, old fellow, for two or three years. As the lawyers say, if you do no good out there, it will give your property time to come round a bit, but I believe you've better stuff in you than you even think yourself, and you'll make money out there instead of spending it. Never did it myself, and a precious old humbug I feel, talking to you like this, but then you know you're young, full of go, and all that sort of thing—never had any myself."

"Yes, you *are* a precious old humbug," said Gauntlett smiling, "but you've been a right good friend to me; as Henry says, you're all there when you're wanted."

So it was finally settled that Rob should go out to the West, cattle-ranching, and try what he could do in three years; at the expiration of which time he would most likely be able to manage a run home, even if circumstances compelled him to go back again. Rose bade her lover a very tearful farewell when the time came. As she told her sister, she had serious misgivings as to whether Rob really loved her; if he did he would never have consented to such a long, long separation as that, she was quite sure there was no necessity for him to leave England if he didn't wish to, and as things stood between them he certainly ought *not* to wish it.

Happening to make some remarks of this nature to Jenny within Lyster's hearing, that gentleman calmly remarked, "Rob's a good fellow, and a clever fellow, and all that, but you know, Miss Rosie, he did make a bit of a fool of himself, racing. Now don't scold, you little shrew; when a man's done that, it is just as well to disappear for a little, and give the world time to forget it—three years will soon slip away."

"Oh! it's all very well for you, you're going to be married before the year's out."

"Yes," said Jim, "and, what's worse, I'm pledged to see you married, too, before three more of them are gone, and what's worst of all, I'll do it."

Rosie laughed as she stretched out her hand; she knew how staunch a friend Lyster had been to both of them. "Pledged, remember," she murmured, as he clasped her extended palm, and Jim replied by a nod of assent.

CONCLUSION.

BETWEEN sixty and seventy, the decade of which I am writing, there was not quite so much sentimental philanthropy as there is at present; it was not then considered better that half a score of men should be murdered, than one hung, for cold-blooded committal of that crime. A public, with no knowledge of the facts except that arrived at by a very

cursory reading of the case in the daily papers, were not so given to empanelling themselves as a volunteer jury, trying the case over again, utterly ignoring the summing-up of the judge, and quietly reversing the verdict of their legitimate brethren. At all events, no efforts were made on behalf of the prisoner Shelton, who duly expiated his crime on the day appointed; as for Barnes, he disappeared for ever into the obscurity of one of our great convict prisons, thereby encountering a doom which he had always professed to regard with more dismay than the gallows. His nerves failed him at a critical moment, and that strange instinctive clinging to life, common to humanity, led him to prefer the hardships and monotony of a convict's life to the rope that threatened him.

According to Dick the Raven's own statement, the money discovered in the bag, with the exception of the bank-note given him by Barnes as "an earnest" of the famous bet, had been gradually but legitimately acquired by the exercise of his calling as a small bookmaker. When released after the trial, he took to attending race-meetings regularly, and the notoriety that attached to him proved a considerable advantage in his vocation; he was a celebrity, and men were curious to have a bet with one who so narrowly escaped being hung for a crime which he did not commit. He thrived apace, and there are few left now who, when they encounter

the prosperous Dick Raven seated in his own Victoria, can recall the day when the ci-devant ostler was tried for his life at the Croftstone Assizes, or tell the origin of his adopted surname.

Mr. Raven, as he is often called now, was right, let him only acquire capital to start with, and he would make his fortune—and he has.

Rob Gauntlett wrote many a letter from the scene of his expatriation, full of the wild life of the West, and containing glowing descriptions of perilous struggles with refractory oxen and contumacious mustangs, not to mention risky encounters with bears and Indians; but they were very different from those depressed letters which used to follow the track of that sorrowful little party that Jim Lyster acted as courier for a year or two ago. Rob was high of heart and full of hope for the future; if he was not as yet making his fortune, he was at all events earning his living, and a little more. He possessed a small share in the ranch to which he was affiliated, and had had no occasion to draw upon his agents for money, since he went out there; he wrote principally to Rosie, and that young lady, at all events, seemed to have no misgivings now about being forgotten. Lyster and Jenny were by this time married, and, though still passing a good deal of their time at Saxham, had established themselves in a cosy little house in Mayfair.

“Time slips away, Jenny,” said Lyster one morning, as he and his wife sat at breakfast in their little dining room, towards the end of the London season. “Rob’s probation has nearly expired, a few months more and we shall have him home again, and hasn’t he proved what I’ve always said, that there’s grit in him?”

“Indeed he has,” replied Mrs. Lyster. “How pleased Rosie will be to see him, but I suppose he’ll have to go out again, and that will make it worse for her than ever; he can’t take her back with him.”

“No, the life’s a little too rough for a lady out there, not that Rosie would flinch, she’s grit too.”

“She’s more self-relying than she used to be, but Jim, dear, even if she could go, what is to become of mamma? she’s never got over the shock of papa’s death, she can’t be left by herself, Rosie has become everything to her of late, naturally.”

“I have thought of all that, and if Rob agrees I don’t think there’ll be any necessity for his going back to the West, as you say your mother can’t be left by herself, but the Grange is big enough, and I don’t see why Rob and Rosie shouldn’t live there with her. I had a long talk about Gauntlett’s affairs with Henry Curtice the other day; he tells me that, owing to the unaccustomed rest Rob has given his property, it has come round considerably

more than the lawyers expected. Now Henry, you know, has been acting as steward at Saxham ever since your father's death, and he says that he cannot attend to it much longer, his practice is rapidly becoming so extensive that he hasn't time. Now, why shouldn't Rob take his place? Henry and I agreed it would all work uncommonly well, your mother makes Henry a handsome allowance for acting as her agent, and that would be of course transferred to Rob; besides," he added laughing. "I'm pledged to see Rosie married in three years, and I've got to do it."

"Jim, you're a dear," replied his wife, "and I'm quite ashamed of myself for ever having laughed at your talents for match-making."

"Well," said Jim, "then all we want is Mrs. Wrexford's assent to the scheme. We're going down to Saxham in a week or two——"

"And mamma will only be too delighted."

There was a family conference held next month at the Grange, and thereat it was agreed that the arrangements Lyster and Curtice had suggested should be carried out on Gauntlett's arrival in England. Mrs. Wrexford declared she could not part with her youngest daughter, and Rosie was equally convinced that she could not endure to part with her lover a second time, and so the thing was carried *nem. con.*, and as Lyster remarked at the finish: "Rob Gauntlett was a very lucky fellow,

and had made a far better end of 'plunging' than usually awaits its votaries, poetical justice not meted out in this case," to which Rosie indignantly replied, that "to have lived for three years as a cowboy, carrying his life in his hand, was sufficient expiation for the follies of any man's youth."

As for old Isaac Martin, he is never tired of inveighing against the monstrous rascality of the turf when things have reached such a pass that men don't hesitate to commit murder to prevent an honest man from winning a race. He often alludes to that terrible Cæsarewitch which ruined Mr. Gauntlett and himself. However, he still continues to train, and puzzles the public just as much about "his lot" in a big handicap as in days of yore.

The years roll by. Rob Gauntlett is married and settled at the Grange, and, as is well-known in the neighbourhood, is the destined heir to Saxham; he makes an excellent country gentleman, and though he keeps a few good mares still in the famous paddocks he disposes of their produce as yearlings, and is very rarely seen on a race-course. Curtice is now a very eminent leader at the Bar, with a practice so large and lucrative that it is a perfect wonder to many of his brethren how he manages to get through the work he does; as for the money he makes, he certainly has no time, and but little inclination, to spend that. He has never married, and it is rumoured that, in years to come,

Jenny's children will share largely in the fortune the great lawyer will leave behind him.

John Crowder is still landlord of the "Marquis of Granby," and glories in a continuously growing narration of *his* version of the Saxham murder. According to his own account the interpretation of the pocket-book was due to himself alone, and Curtice, Gauntlett, and all other avenging actors in the drama disappear. It was he found the watch; it was he discovered the betting-book and connected the murder with the race; the disguises he assumed, according to his own account, were innumerable. He has told the tale so often that he now thoroughly believes in it himself, and only a short time ago brought down the parlour of the "Marquis of Granby" with a spirited description of his desperate fight with Shelton on board the steamer, and, strange to say, his old cronies never seem to tire of listening to the wondrous story of Bobadil's Cæsarewitch and all that came of it.

THE END.

An Appeal to Invalids

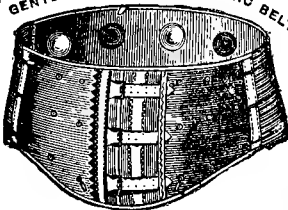
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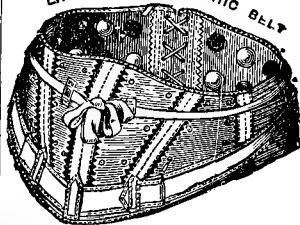
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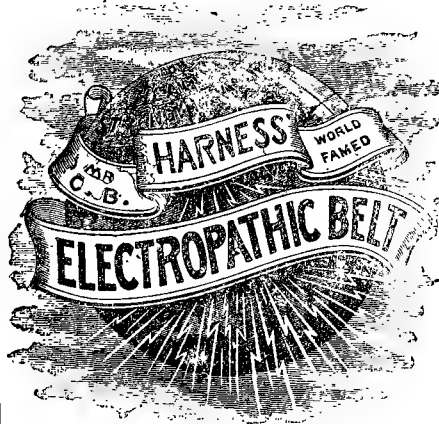
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Herbert Riley, Esq., Lynton House, Guiseley, Yorkshire, writes, "Mrs. Riley wishes me to say that the Electropathic Belt she purchased from you over a month ago has done her a great deal of good. When she received it she was very ill in bed, but after putting on the Belt a marked improvement soon took place and she was able to sit up a bit the same evening, the following day to go downstairs. She has been much better since wearing the appliance, and I trust her treatment will continue to do her good."



HYSTERIA.

Mrs. W. Francis, Church Street, Lyme Regis, writes, "I have much pleasure in informing you that the Electropathic Belt received from you on the 9th of this month for my granddaughter, E. Speare, has worked wonders in the short time she has worn it. She has been a great sufferer from weakness, etc., for the last three years, but is now, through your valuable appliances, very much better. Her appetite has very much improved and her spirits are cheerful, in fact, the change is wonderful."

MR. C. B. HARNESS, the President of the Institute, and the other Officers of the Company, may be consulted, either personally or by letter, free of charge, on all matters relating to Health and the application of Medical Electricity. Call or write to

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See *The Times*, July 15th, 1884.

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